

GRIMDARK
FUTURE

MEAL TICKET

SHORT STORY



**ONE
PAGE
RULES**

Meal Ticket

by Austin McIlisley

As the wind shifted, Anya could still smell the something that set her ill at ease. She shifted behind Rangji, the reins of the other Jackal's Beast hanging loose and easy in her hands as the creature made its way towards their destination with both Jackals on its back..

"You need to relax," said Rangji, "This whole area is abandoned. We've got ourselves an easy meal ticket with this job."

"I'm not worrying," shot back Anya. "I'm just being vigilant. We can't afford to mess this up or we'll be stuck rationing for who knows how long."

"Alright, alright. You have such a temper when you're hungry," Rangji smiled, "Anyhow, it looks like Egayni isn't feeling tired yet, so I think we can keep up this pace."

Egayni, her friend's mount, led the way across the mesa and towards the secluded valley that her map had laid out. They'd been given a map and commissioned to find a wreck and bring back a specific item from the crashed ship.

They managed to make the trek all the way to their destination without issue. The wreck was right where the map said it would be. Rust had started to eat at some of the edges here and there, and by Anya's reckoning, it was likely over a decade old.

Certainly not the freshest wreck she had come across, but neither the oldest by a long shot. The craft was fairly small, a Robot Legion shuttle but with only a lone Robot visible, flung out of the craft during the collision.

Anya inspected the Robot closely, but even a quick glance told her that it had not moved in years. It had probably died during the initial crash.

A growl rattled out from a crevice in the wrecked ship.

"Looks like we need to clear out the local residents," said Rangji with a grin, and she pulled out his Flamer and ignited it. She shot a gout of flame towards the space the growl had come from, careful to not splash any flames onto the ship's fuel store, and was rewarded with a screech.

A razorspine lizard fled out of the wreck and into the shelter of some distant rocks. A few beetles and other insects followed soon after.

Anya had already crouched down, inspecting the fallen Robot, "You couldn't have warned me first?"

Rangji shrugged, aiming her flamer towards the rocks where the lizard had fled, "It might have pounced on you first. You should be thanking me but I think the smell of cooked meat just has you on edge."

Anya's stomach growled at the mention of food, but she smiled, "We'll be feasting soon enough. My stomach's just gotta wait a little longer."

She looked back down at the Robot, inspecting it carefully.

"Not much here worth salvaging, especially with the craft on fire. Still," Anya drew out a blade, "I think we can get what we came for."

She moved it carefully over the back of the Robot's neck, prying open a protective hatch. Carefully, she moved the knife into the neck, drawing out a glowing cylinder.

"I got the memory co-"

There was the echo of a single gunshot echoing within the valley, and Anya could feel her gut lurch in horror as she saw a quickly spreading blood stain across Rangji's lightly-armored chest plating.

The Jackal's grip faltered and she dropped her Flamer.

Rangji gasped desperately as she bled out.

Anya dove forward into the cockpit to find some cover, arming her rifle and whipping her head around, trying to find the source of where the shot had come from.

"If it isn't the little pup, all on her own and way over her head, once again," the mocking voice of Sikja came from behind her.

He was one of the foremost salvage salvagers for the Ruganyi clan, but rumours of ruthlessness and thievery had always followed him.

Rumours now confirmed by the smoking rifle in his hand.

Beside him were Injo and Tarji, two of his most trusted lackeys. Together, they formed a trio that had been the bane of Anya's clan for years. It had been a professional rivalry, until now.

Injo crouched over Rangji's fallen form, hefting her flamethrower and gurgling out through his scarred throat, "Do you think the other pup is still here?"

Huddled next to the motionless pilot, Anya peeked her head over to see Sikja snatch the flamethrower away from Injo'.

She held her breath, only to hear her stomach growl.

"Come out, pup," Injo smiled, "I don't care if you're hiding behind that ship or inside of it; I'll roast you either way."

Sikja growled, "If you roast the ship, you roast anything valuable inside it. Put the flamethrower away for a second."

A minute later, Sikja gave a triumphant cry and emerged from where he had dug into the wreck, hand slick with grease but holding an ornate crystal inside a woven golden metal matrix.

"Haha!" Sikja smirked, "This is probably what they were after. Nothing else here left worth scavenging."

He nodded to Injo. "Alright, now you can light it up."

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Outside, she heard Injo speak as he approached the wrecked ship, "Oh, that's a nice bauble there."

Eyes widening, Anya checked her pouches. She had dropped the memory core when Rangi was shot.

She heard his hand brush against the sand, followed by a clinking noise as he tucked it into his backpack. Then she heard the crackling of his flamethrower igniting again.

Leaning over, she began kicking at a side panel on the cockpit. Injo must have heard the banging because he growled with a meaty chuckle.

Anya managed to break open the weakened metal along the crack she had spotted and dove through the small hole right before Injo's flames swept over the cockpit and ship.

He bathed it in fire for several minutes continuously, until there was an ominous series of rumbling pops and hissing noises, and the flames seemed to leap even higher.

"You beetle-brained fool!" cried Sikja, "Move! Move, or you'll die with the pup."

He and Tarji were already diving behind a boulder, and Anya sprang to do the same on the far side of the ship, grateful that she had not yet been spotted.

The Robot Legion craft buckled and exploded with a blast that sent metal shrapnel across the area and rattled Anya's teeth in her head. Hunched behind a rock, she breathed as quietly as she could, silently willing the trio to give her a clean shot.

As she heard their voices fading and tipped her head above the rock, she could see that whatever he had ignited within the Robot Legion craft had sent up an acrid cloud of black smoke. The haze made finding their targets through it near impossible.

Better to wait an hour and have the perfect shot, then move in haste and have to start the hunt all over again.

As soon as she felt the coast was clear, she leapt down to where Rangi had tied Egayni off to a rock. It loped over to her and, straining at the limits of its lead, nuzzled towards her as it sought attention. Anya obliged the Beast, rubbing Egayni beneath a neck ridge as she looked back to the smoldering hulk of the Robot Legion's ship.

The Flamer had made thorough work of the interior.

Anya gave Rangi's resting place a final look, before spurring Egayni in the direction of the trio that had stolen their prize and killed her clanmate.

After two grueling days of travel, with only a few brief rests, Anya finally caught sight of the wreck-city the Ruganyis were headed. The ship was massive, kilometers in length and embedded in the ground at a steep angle.

The interior had been hollowed out, and formed into a dense network of rooms, streets, and plazas. The rusted and bent prow glittered in the sun as she rode Egayni through to the city's main thoroughfare, a few patches of dim blue paint still visible on the ship's hull between the wide swathes of rust.

She and Rangi had set out from here less than a week earlier, and Anya had some idea of where the Ruganyis lurked within the wreck-city.

Staying out of sight behind the surges of the crowd, Anya made her way to the back of the groups until she spotted the trio that had robbed her and killed her kin.

Still, as she watched, the three of them ducked into some sort of storeroom similar to what she had seen on other deck levels in other areas of the wreck-city.

She sat back in an alcove to keep an eye on the storeroom entrance, as the crowd swirled and passed by. There was a large group of refugees who had come after their city had been destroyed by a falling ship. Some of them were going around to beg for food or seek work.

One of them approached Anya.

"Kind stranger, could you spare a morsel to eat for an unfortunate soul?"

Anya hesitated a moment, before sighing. She reached into her pouch to pass them some dried jerky. The beggar excitedly thanked her and scurried away. She had only a few remaining sticks left, and knew that without the memory core, she might soon have to resort to begging for scraps as well.

The Ruganyi trio emerged minutes later. While she couldn't hear their voices over the sounds of the crowd in the streets, she suspected Injo and Tarji were seeking a meal before settling down to unpack and process their ill-gotten gains.

Anya relished the hearty smell of fresh food from the markets after so many meals of dried meat, but she willed herself to focus. She knew that she didn't have much time before they sold the memory core.

Anya ducked forward, skirting around the edge of the crowd to get to the building the Ruganyis had left.

The front was securely locked and guarded. Anya circled around near the back and found what she was looking for.

There were a trio of filter vents with merely snapped-on grating. She cut through the grates carefully, before sliding into the Ruganyi headquarters.

Anya explored the base as best she could, seeking both the memory core and the crystal that Sikja had plucked from the wreck. She found no sign of either, and she realized that the Ruganyi trio must have taken it with them when they went out to trade for food at the marketplace.

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Her only chance to recover it before they sold it would be shortly after the trio returned to their outpost.

Crossing through the warehouse, in order to avoid the increased guards that she had seen in the hallways, Anya noticed an insignia that caught her eye.

It was on some of the condensed food storage crates that had been stored in the ship, in the colony ship that had originally become the wreck-city. The Ruganyis must have found an untouched storage room and looted it.

Anya could see that there were nearly a hundred of these crates, each one enough to feed a family for months. She quickly closed the lid of the crate she had been investigating and slunk out of the headquarters through the concealed hole that she had made, replacing the grating so it was invisible from the outside.

Already her mind was conjuring up a plan for how to ensure she could retrieve her stolen salvage after the Ruganyis had returned to their own domain.

Making her way down to the market path, Anya scanned and quickly found what she was looking for. It was the group of Jackal refugees, who looked hopeful when Anya approached. Quickly, she reached the elder of the group.

"Gray one, you and your kin are in need of food, yes?"

The elder nodded, sweeping her hand towards the nearby refugees, "Yes, we have managed to survive through the kindness of strangers, but only just. There is little food to spare, and less work to find. If our fortunes do not change, my clan will vanish like water spilled on the mesas."

She smiled. "Well, some vermin who have robbed and killed my own kin are sitting on enough ration-crates to feed your entire clan for at least a season. I can get inside and unlock their warehouse doors: All I need is some help in liberating the food from those who would hoard it."

The elder's eyes opened wide but her expression grew stern, "A generous offer. Can we trust you?"

"I am out for revenge, not rations," Anya replied, "If you can help me, your people are welcome to take what they will."

The elder nodded, "I will gather my people."

Anya gave the old Jackal the address of the warehouse, and warned her to be ready. As Anya left, she could already hear the rippling whispers and excited voices as word of their plan began to spread.

Returning to the Ruganyi warehouse's massive door, Anya could see the refugees had arrived as they had promised, the excited group milling around as murmurs of anticipation raced through the clan as she arrived.

"I shall get the doors open," she said, "and then from there, it is up to you to grab as many crates as you can and spread them around on this and the other nearby levels. Understood?"

There were rounds of nods all around her

Anya returned a nod to the group, "As soon as the door opens, be on your guard."

With that, she snuck back to the grating that she had made a hole in earlier and carefully made her way back inside. She could hear voices from one of the rooms, Sikja was berating Injo and Tarji. She moved through the vent until she could see that the memory core she was looking for was sitting in a small open case near the doorway.

Part of her realized she could simply grab it and run. She could be out the door before Sikja and his henchmen could react, and safely outside and into the crowds before the other Ruganyis could mobilize in pursuit.

It would also mean abandoning the plan of opening the warehouse door and getting the crates of food and rations transferred back to those in need.

She thought for a moment, considering whether the risks were worth taking when she now had a chance to just grab what she'd come for.

As she paused, her stomach gave a growl, a reminder she had not eaten yet that day.

Clenching her teeth, Anya made her decision.

She crept down to the warehouse and emerged from the vent near the warehouse doors. Pulling open the circuit panel for the door lock, she looked over the jumble of wires.

She smiled as she found what she was looking for, unplugging a pair of wires before switching them. The door began to rumble open, followed by a howling wail of an alarm siren.

Anya began waving over the waiting refugees, who ran into the warehouse and began hefting and pulling the boxes and crates towards the front. Anya could hear shouts through one of the interior doors. Within a few moments, the door slid open.

Anya saw Sikja, Injo, and Tarji led the charge into the warehouse as she readied her rifle. They were accompanied by a half dozen more Ruganyis, snarling and snapping as they opened fire on Anya and the refugees. Several of the refugees returned fire with scrap pistols and improvised weapons.

A massive explosion rang out, catching Anya and the refugees by surprise as they ducked back into cover.

A wave of shrapnel scattered throughout the warehouse, forcing them to take shelter.

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Glancing again around the crates, Anya could see that Sikja was cackling. Over his shoulder was a Missile Launcher, the muzzle smoking with a thin hazy trail.

"Run while you still can, little pup!" he screeched, taunting Anya as he reloaded.

The available cover was quickly growing scarce as a second explosion rocked the room. Luckily, this one had no one hiding behind it, but soon there would be nowhere left to take cover.

It would be only a matter of time, however, until one landed directly on Anya and her allies.

Anya knew she needed an opening to take a shot.

Calling out through the mayhem and the crackle of burning supplies, she yelled, "What's the matter, Sikja? Don't like it when you're the one getting your finds taken from you? Now you're just wasting food!"

She heard a scoff as he called back in kind, yelling above the din, "Pup, I'm going to make you wish you'd died in that wreck!"

Anya winced preparing for another explosion.

Instead, there was a clanking sound of something hitting the ground, and a round of curses from Sikja, berating Tarji's clumsiness.

Steeling herself, Anya armed her rifle and spun around the corner of the crate. Sikja's rocket launcher was empty, and Tarji had a Shred Rifle slung across his back.

In Tarji's paws, she could see the tip of the armed rocket he had dropped while helping Sikja reload. That second provided Anya all the opening she needed.

Sighting down the scope at her target and squeezed the trigger.

"For Rangi," she muttered to herself.

The shot was followed by a cluster of explosions as the shot ignited the rocket that Tarji was holding, destroying all three Ruganyis in a burst of fire and shrapnel.

A chain reaction set off the remaining rockets they had piled nearby, sending the surviving Ruganyis into disarray.

The refugees moved to grab what rations they could, while Anya ran deeper into the headquarters. She leapt past burning piles of debris and down the corridors she had memorized.

Coming upon Sikja's quarters, she was relieved to see the memory core was right where she had seen it last, the box still perched amidst a pile of other loot and treasures.

Anya grabbed the memory core and crystal, leaving the burning building behind her. Soon, Anya made her way back to the market. Soon, her destination was in sight.

Her contact was a Robot sitting in a tent among the Jackal stands, sifting through a pile of documents and data slates scattered over the desk. The Robot gestured for her to approach, hunched slightly from worn servos and a few lingering injuries that had apparently proven difficult to repair.

"My thanks for your diligence, Anya. I trust that you were able to recover the memory core successfully?"

She held out a hand with the small piece of hardware. The robot took it with a delicate touch and held it up to the dim light in the room.

"In good working order, it appears. I appreciate your dedication. I hope you find the payment adequate."

The bag of what passed for coinage in this wreck-city was larger than Anya had expected or had been agreed upon.

"My apologies," the Robot spoke softly, "Accept my condolences for the loss of your comrade."

Anya gave a respectful nod, though her face dropped as she thought of Rangi

The Robot looked back to their desk, "If you seek another job, we have another task for you."

Anya leaned forward with interest, but then her ears perked up hearing a commotion outside.

Excusing herself, she ducked her head out and saw the other Jackals in the market path were all looking upwards, pointing and shouting excitedly. Following their gaze, she could see the streaking orange-red glow of an incoming ship, bits burning off here and there, showing that it was an uncontrolled crashing descent, like almost all ships that reached their atmosphere.

Turning back to the Robot, Anya smiled, "Perhaps another time. For now, I need to get moving if I'm to make it while the pickings are still good."

Letting loose a loud, low, warbling whistle, she was rewarded a moment later with the sight of Egayni bounding up, nuzzling under her chin for a moment before leaning down slightly so she could lift herself into the saddle. Grabbing the reins, she urged the Beast to go as fast as he could, as dozens of other nomads like her joined her on the open plains outside the wreck-city, chasing the falling starship.

GF: Firefight - Meal Ticket

Mission Background

A warehouse full of much-needed ration crates has been found ripe for the taking, and now the warbands must fight to take the food and protect it, whilst destroying enemy rations.

The Battlefield

For this mission you'll need a 4'x4' table with at least 15-20 pieces of terrain on it.

The Armies

For this mission you'll need two armies of equal point cost, and each army must have at least one hero.

Special Set-Up

Before deployment, roll one die for each deployment zone, and on a 5+ that zone is extended by 12".

Deployment

The players roll-off, and the winner picks zone A or B to be their deployment zone, with their opponent taking the opposite. Then the players alternate in placing one unit each within their deployment zone, starting with the player that won the deployment roll-off.

First Turn

The players must roll-off to see who gets the first turn.

Objectives

Before deployment, players have to set up a total of 2D3+4 objective markers.

The players roll-off to see who goes first, and then alternate in placing one objective marker each outside of the deployment zones, and at least 6" away from other objectives.

At the end of each round, if a unit is within 3" of a marker whilst enemies aren't, then remove the marker and it counts as being carried by the unit.

If the unit is stunned or destroyed, the marker is dropped on the spot.

At the end of the game the player that seized most objective markers gets 2 VPs for each objective marker they seized, plus the player that destroyed most objective markers gets 1 VP for each objective marker they destroyed.

At the end of the game players get 1 VP for each enemy hero they destroyed, as well as 1 VP for each enemy unit they destroyed during the last round.

The game ends after 4 rounds, and the player that scored most VPs wins.

Special Rules

Piled Crates: Units counts as being in Cover whilst within 3" of an objective.

Bulky Cargo: Units carrying an objective marker move -2" on Advance, and -4" on Rush/Charge actions.

Fragile Foodstuffs: Whenever a unit carrying an objective marker is attacked, roll one die. On a 5+ the objective is destroyed by the attacker.

Special Equipment

Rocket Munitions: Before the game begins, each army may provide D3 units with rocket munitions. When rolling for the Fragile Foodstuffs rule, units with munitions get +1 to the roll.

