

DEATH'S LEGACY

By Sandy Mitchell

The third exciting instalment in the tale behind *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay!*

RUDI AND HANNA'S adventures are about to become a lot more dangerous as they seek refuge in Altdorf, capital city of the Empire. When Rudi finally discovers the dark secret of his family, he is forced to turn to his mortal enemy, the witch hunter Gerhard, for help. But can Rudi ever be free from the evil trapped in his soul, or will the battle to destroy it also destroy him?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandy Mitchell is a pseudonym of Alex Stewart, who has been working as a freelance writer for the last couple of decades. He has written science fiction and fantasy in both personae, as well as television scripts, magazine articles, comics, and gaming material. His television credits include the high tech espionage series *Bugs*, for which, as Sandy, he also wrote one of the novelisations.

Apart from both miniatures and roleplaying gaming his hobbies include the martial arts of Aikido and Iaido, rifle shooting, and playing the guitar badly.

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The following is an excerpt from *Death's Legacy* by Sandy Mitchell.

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RUDI DIRECTED HIS stumbling footsteps away from the blazing ruins of the shantytown on the mudflats, the leaping flames behind the two fugitives seeming to turn the snowflakes flurrying around them into wisps of floating gold. Despite the way they blurred his vision, he found himself grateful for the presence of the drifting motes of ice. The cold they brought was intense, all the more so after the almost unbearable heat they'd so recently been exposed to, and the discomfort helped to keep him focused, and stop his mind from reeling under the strain of attempting to understand the events of the last few hours.

He glanced across at Hanna, who was still keeping pace with him despite the exhaustion that made her sway with every step. The price of the wild burst of uncontrolled magic, which had consumed the strange settlement of mutants and renegades, still blazed behind them.

'Are you all right?' he asked, realising how stupid the question was even as he asked it, but Hanna simply nodded.

'I'll live,' she said grimly.

'We both will,' Rudi assured her, sweeping his gaze across the ruins surrounding them, and adjusting his grip on the sword he hadn't bothered to sheath. The Doodkanal, he knew from personal experience, was no place to seem weak. Too many desperate and depraved individuals eked out a marginal existence there, and human predators lurked in every shadow. To his unspoken relief, however, he could detect none of the signs of stealthy movement

which might betray the presence of any of the local denizens. No doubt the conflagration in the distance had them all spooked enough to stay well clear of the area, or the biting cold had driven them to seek whatever shelter they could find here, in the most derelict corner of Marienburg.

Rudi grinned, without humour. Anonymous footpads were the least of their worries. Gerhard and his band of mercenaries were no doubt still close at hand, although whether the witch hunter and his associates were in any fit state to fight after the battle they'd just been through was a debatable point. Rudi shook his head, dismissing the thought. He had too much respect for their martial abilities to dismiss them as a threat, despite the battering they'd taken. Besides, Krieger's sellswords were implacable foes on their own account, not just out of loyalty to the man who was paying them. At least Alwyn wouldn't be using her magic again this soon.

That brought his whirling thoughts back to Greta Reifenstahl. The witch had vanished again, as abruptly as she'd appeared to save them from the madman he'd once thought his friend. Despite Hanna's delight at discovering that her mother was still alive, Rudi felt a tremor of unease as he considered the sorceress's words to him: *'The fool was right about one thing, anyway. You do have a destiny.'* She clearly knew something of his origins, and the secret he'd hoped to uncover from Magnus von Blackenburg. Indeed, it now looked as if she'd been trying to protect him from the merchant, and the bizarre cult of disease and decay that he'd led, ever since his arrival in Marienburg. Equally clearly, she'd been touched by Chaos in some way herself; the horns on her forehead made that all too obvious.

In spite of himself he glanced across at Hanna, still plodding determinedly on at his shoulder, wondering for a brief, guilty instant if the taint her mother bore had some-

how been passed on to her daughter, but that was ridiculous. After all they'd been through together, if he couldn't trust Hanna, he couldn't trust anyone.

'Wait,' he whispered, as they reached the mouth of an alleyway he recognised. Whirling snowflakes flickered against his face, the cobbles beneath his feet already slick with the first powdering of white. No footprints were visible apart from his and Hanna's, but that didn't mean much. Torches were flaring in the distance, and thin lines of light were visible around the shutters of some of the houses surrounding them. They'd already reached the more habitable margins of the Doodkanal, and a few more steps would lead them into the bustling streets of the Winkelmarkt.

He hesitated, trying to assess the risks. On the one hand, he knew almost every inch of that ward, as a result of having patrolled it for several months while working as a member of the city watch. He knew every bolthole, and every patch of concealing shadow that might help them to slip through unobserved. On the other hand, so did his erstwhile colleagues, who would undoubtedly be searching for both of them since he'd helped Hanna escape from the watch house earlier that evening.

'What's the matter?' Hanna asked, her face pinched in the diffuse illumination, huddling deeper inside the overlarge travelling cloak that she'd taken from the captain of the soldiers on the moors. She was shivering, and not just from the cold. She'd been severely debilitated by the effects of Gerhard's magic-nullifying talisman, which had been slowly sucking the life out of her ever since the fugitives had arrived in Marienburg, and the torrent of mystical energy that had flooded through her following its removal had taken its own toll. Clearly she couldn't stand much more of this strength-sapping chill.

'Just trying to work out the best route to the Suiddock,'

Rudi told her, shading the truth a little. Dawn couldn't be far off, and the *Reikmaiden* was due to sail at first light. If they missed her, and he couldn't envisage Shenk delaying the departure of his vessel on their account, their last hope of escaping Marienburg would be gone. There simply wasn't time to take a more circuitous route.

'Don't take too long,' Hanna said, her teeth chattering, clearly having come to the same conclusion.

There was nothing else for it. Putting away the sword, which would have attracted too much attention in the populated streets, he offered the girl his other arm. He half expected her to spurn it, but Hanna was too far gone to stand on her dignity and took it gratefully, leaning against him for support. Once again, Rudi was astonished at how light she felt, but concealed his concern as best he could, angling his body to shield her from the wind as much as possible.

Luck seemed to be with them at first. As they slipped into the streets of the Winkelmarkt, Rudi's ears were assailed by the familiar sounds of the early risers going about their business, mingling with those of the last die-hard revellers lurching back to their beds. Shopkeepers were stirring, preparing their wares, and a few enterprising peddlers were firing up braziers in anticipation of doing good business with hot snacks to help keep out the cold. Though the streets were still comparatively empty, they were crowded enough to hold out the hope of concealment, as they blended into the throng of bustling people going about their everyday concerns.

Spotting a discarded wine bottle in the gutter, Rudi scooped it up, hoping that anyone noticing their dishevelled appearance, and Hanna's unsteady gait, would draw the obvious conclusion and dismiss them from their minds without looking too closely.

'Rudi?' someone called. He tensed, and kept moving,

hoping that the hail was meant for someone else. He had a common enough name after all. Then the voice came again, familiar and insistent, accompanied by the unmistakable sound of running feet. 'Rudi, wait!' Cursing their luck, he turned, seeing the floppy black cap of a member of the city watch forging through the intervening citizens, its owner waving frantically in their direction.

'Gerrit,' Rudi said, half in greeting, half as a warning to Hanna. The two of them had met briefly, he remembered, when Hanna had visited him at the watch barracks. Gerrit was his best friend among the Caps, and had been unable to resist teasing him a little about the relationship he pretended to assume had existed between him and the girl. 'What are you doing up at this ungodly hour?' The two of them had rotated to the day shift the morning before, and weren't due on duty for some hours yet.

'Everyone's been called in,' Gerrit said slowly, his hand hovering near the hilt of his sword, but to Rudi's unspoken relief making no attempt to draw it yet. Despite trying to pretend he was simply engaged in a casual conversation, Rudi couldn't help glancing around as unobtrusively as he could, his old forester's instincts searching for the rest of Gerrit's patrol, but for some reason the young Cap seemed to be alone. Perhaps he hadn't heard the news of Rudi's treachery yet. 'But then you must have expected that.' The tone of voice in which this last comment was added put paid to that slender hope almost as soon as it had flared. Still, if anyone among the watch would be prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt, it would be Gerrit. Anyone else, he was sure, would have drawn steel and arrested them both by now. Perhaps he could still bluff it out.

'I've been a bit busy,' Rudi said, flourishing the bottle and blessing the gently falling snow for concealing Hanna's features even more effectively. She huddled deeper inside the enveloping cloak, the hood falling forward to conceal her

features. The last time he'd seen Gerrit, on his way out of the barracks to rescue the girl, he'd contrived to give his friend the impression that he was meeting another young woman; maybe he could convince him that he'd been otherwise engaged all night, and that whatever he'd heard was some kind of mistake. 'That evening out lasted a bit longer than I expected.' Picking up the unspoken cue Hanna giggled, as if drunk, and leaned into him as if suddenly losing her footing.

'I remember.' Gerrit nodded. 'You said you were meeting Rauke van Stolke.' Of course he knew her too, slightly. She was a Cap herself, in the neighbouring Suiddock ward. He nodded affably to Hanna. 'Morning, Rauke.'

'Morning,' Hanna said, slurring her voice in an attempt to disguise it. She had no idea what the woman she was impersonating normally sounded like, but under the circumstances that probably wasn't important. Gerrit nodded again, as if something had just been confirmed, and drew his sword.

'Do you mind explaining how you got here from the Draainbrug watch house so fast?' he asked her. 'I only left you half an hour ago.' That at least explained why he was on his own, Rudi thought. He must have been on his way back from delivering a message to the Suiddock watch, warning them to be on the lookout for the pair of fugitives.

'Ger.' Rudi took a step back, as if startled and confused. 'I don't know what you've heard, but it's all a misunderstanding. There's no need for this.'

He flung the bottle at his friend. Gerrit ducked reflexively, wrong-footed for a moment, and Rudi dived at him, clamping a hand around the wrist of the young Cap's sword hand. Gerrit pivoted, trying to throw him, and Rudi countered, drawing on every street-brawling technique he'd learned as a law enforcer, keeping on his feet by a miracle.

'Hanna, run,' he shouted, and smashed his forehead into the other youth's face. Gerrit reeled back, blood gushing from his nose, and closed again, swinging his sword at Rudi's head. Rudi moved to evade it, his feet skidding on the carpet of fresh snow, and fell heavily. Gerrit loomed over him, his sword raised to strike.

'Witch-loving bastard,' he said, thrusting straight at Rudi's face. Before he could complete the movement, however, he staggered, an expression of surprise flitting briefly across his visage. The hilt of the dagger that Hanna habitually kept concealed in her bodice was projecting from his chest, and he fell heavily to his knees. It seemed that, despite her exhaustion, she'd lost none of the skill in knife throwing that she'd learned from Bruno while they'd been travelling with Krieger's mercenary band.

'Come on.' Hanna pulled Rudi to his feet, with a surprising surge of strength. She seemed sharper, more alert; although where the energy was coming from he had no idea. 'We have to run.'

'Help! Watch! Murder!' a nearby fishwife screeched, her wide eyes fixed on Gerrit's prostrate form. Hanna plucked her dagger from the young Cap's chest with a moist sucking sound. None of the passers-by seemed inclined to intervene – and Rudi couldn't blame them – but as he forced his legs into motion, his head spun with the enormity of what had just happened. With that amount of noise, the watch would be there in moments, he had no doubt, which might at least save Gerrit...

'Is he dead?' he asked. Hanna nodded jerkily.

'Should be, I aimed for the heart.' She dodged down an alleyway behind a fish-gutter's, the stench of old entrails still discernible despite the bitter chill. Rudi felt a shiver going through him at her words, which wasn't entirely due to the cold: Hanna was a healer, dedicated to preserving life, or at least she had been. Almost as if she could read his

thoughts, she glanced back at him, her pale face framed by the hood of her cloak so that it seemed to be floating unsupported in a circle of darkness. 'I'm sorry about your friend, but it was him or us, and he died a lot easier than we will if they catch us.'

Rudi nodded, unable to argue with her. If they were caught, they'd be burned, there was no question about that. Hanna was a witch, a sorceress, and her death was inevitable if she fell into the hands of the authorities. He was accused of heresy, targeted by a witch hunter, which was almost as bad. If they couldn't make it aboard the riverboat tonight, they were both as good as dead.

'This way,' he said, doubling through a courtyard in which lines of washing hung, stiff as tavern signs in the bitter cold. A low wall lay beyond it, behind which one of the innumerable back canals that threaded their way through the city lapped against its banks. Hanna glanced up and down the waterway, into which the drifting snowflakes vanished without a trace.

'It's a dead end!' she said.

Rudi shook his head. 'No it's not.' He clambered up on the wall, and held out a hand for her to join him. She took it, the skin of her palm feeling strangely warm against his, and bounded up beside him, all trace of her former exhaustion gone. He had no time to wonder about that now, though. 'It just looks that way.' A couple of planks bridged the gap, placed there by the residents of the sprawling rooming house that enclosed three sides of the courtyard, as a makeshift short cut to the boatyard on the other side where most of them worked. He edged across the frost-slick wood cautiously, trying not to look down at the scum-flecked water below, or let the snowflakes whirling about his face distract him too much. They flickered hypnotically across his field of vision, threatening to overwhelm him with vertigo at every step. Hanna, on the other

hand, trotted in his wake as sure-footedly as if she was merely out for an afternoon stroll.

'Where are we?' she asked, as they hopped down a pile of lumber, evidently left as a makeshift staircase on the other side.

'Van der Decken's,' Rudi replied. The Winkelmarkt was well known for the quality of its boatyards, which produced most of the small craft that plied the waterways of Marienburg. The local residents knew the location of every one of them, but Hanna looked confused for a moment, and he remembered that she'd spent most of her stay in the city in the Templewijk. 'The slips are on the other side of the yard, near the fish docks.' Hanna nodded, orientated again, and Rudi became aware that her face seemed to be gently illuminated from below. It must be the stone she'd carried around her neck since taking it from the skaven they'd encountered in the wilderness all those months ago. It had glowed once before, he remembered, although Hanna had been at a loss to explain the phenomenon. Perhaps it was sustaining her in some fashion, lending her the energy she needed to get away.

'How are we going to get across the Bruynwater?' she asked. Rudi had been wondering the same thing. The *Reikmaiden* was berthed on the island of Luydenhoek, on the other side of the main shipping channel, and only one bridge, the Draainbrug, crossed the mighty waterway. After what Gerrit had told them, it was certain to be watched. Rudi shrugged.

'We're in a boatyard,' he said. Unfortunately that didn't help. The only vessels they found were in various states of assembly or repair, and none seemed river worthy to his inexperienced eyes, at least so far as he could tell in what fitful illumination was afforded by the lamps and torches in the nearby street. He began to wish that the baleful light of Morrslieb, the Chaos moon, was still visible instead of

being hidden by the snow clouds. Sickly and necrotic as it was, even that would have been something of a help.

At length they gave it up as a bad job, and, moving cautiously, ventured out into the street again. Fortunately, none of the passers-by on this side of the water paid them any heed, apparently intent on nothing more than getting to their destinations and out of the snow as quickly as possible, and they made it through the rest of the Winkelmarkt without attracting any more unwelcome attention. There were a number of narrow squeaks, however: several times they were forced to take cover in the shadows or duck down a side passage to avoid watch patrols, grim-faced men that Rudi recognised and had once worked alongside, now determined to hunt him down.

A couple of times he thought about donning his own uniform hat, hiding behind the authority it gave him, and then dismissed the idea. His former colleagues would be on the lookout for him in any case, and there was no point in making himself even more visible. They'd be bound to hail another watchman, even if they didn't recognise his face at once, to exchange news and information, and all the other Caps he'd seen were in groups of two or three. Alone, he'd be far more noticeable than he would be just trying to blend in with the civilians surrounding them.

They passed into the Suiddock ward at last, and his steps became hesitant. He didn't know the streets here the way he did in the Winkelmarkt, just the main thoroughfares, and remaining concealed would be far more difficult. On the other hand, the crowds around them had grown as well, teamsters and stevedores hurrying to work, the bustle of the dock area never entirely still even at this pre-dawn hour. Indeed, several cargoes seemed to be on the move already. Taking Hanna by the elbow, he led her in among a tightly packed string of wagons heading for the Draainbrug. With a bit of luck they might be able to cross

it, concealed by the surrounding traffic.

That hope was soon extinguished, however. Long before they could reach the marvel of dwarf engineering, the wagons stopped, blocked by a milling throng of pedestrians and other carts.

‘What is it?’ Hanna asked anxiously. ‘What’s going on?’

The carter on the wagon beside them glanced down, and gestured in the vague direction of the bridge.

Craning his neck, Rudi could just make out the huge tower in the middle of the river around which the mighty structure pivoted.

‘The bridge is open,’ the man said. He stood up on his seat for a better view, glancing left and right. ‘That’s funny. There doesn’t seem to be a ship coming.’ Rudi fought to keep his face neutral. Of course, he thought. The first thing the Suiddock watch would have done after getting Gerrit’s message would be to open the bridge, trapping the fugitives in the southern half of the city. The disruption would be severe, of course, but the authorities would be prepared to tolerate it for a little while if it meant catching a couple of dangerous heretics.

‘Come on.’ He led Hanna through the growing, and increasingly restive, throng. Before long, some of the Suiddock Caps would be turning up to keep order, and they wouldn’t be able to evade detection once that happened. The bridge was flanked by jetties where water coaches could usually be found, the Bruynwater being just as much an artery of commerce for the local communities that lined its banks as it was for the city as a whole, and if they were quick enough they ought to be able to hail one before too many of the people surrounding them had the same idea. ‘Stick close.’

‘Like a poultice,’ the young witch assured him grimly. He’d been worried that her exhaustion would return, and that she wouldn’t be in any condition to continue, but

whatever preternatural energy was sustaining her seemed undiminished.

As they slipped through the crowd, he glanced back, and almost froze. A trio of Black Caps was forging its way through the crush towards the bridge, and a couple of them were carrying the unmistakable silhouettes of blunderbusses. That would have been worrying enough, but the third member of the group made the breath catch in his throat. Rauke van Stolke was clearing the way for her colleagues, none too gently with the flat of her sword, directing a bitter tirade back over her shoulder as she did so.

'Typical,' Rudi heard above the babble of the crowd. 'I finally meet someone who looks like he's halfway decent, and he turns out to be a witch-rutting Chaos worshipper.' She vented her anger by barging a halfling peddler out of the way with unnecessary vigour.

Rudi flushed. Woe betide any petty lawbreaker coming to her attention today, he thought. With a pang, he found himself remembering the pleasant meal they'd shared only the evening before, and the sense of wellbeing that had followed it. He'd enjoyed her company, and had been looking forward to experiencing more of it. He lowered his head, although from embarrassment at having hurt the woman's feelings or the more practical necessity of evading detection he couldn't have said.

'Keep moving,' Hanna urged him in an imperative undertone, and Rudi nodded, relieved at the distraction. The steps to the jetty were close at hand, and so far no one appeared to have noticed the two fugitives. As they descended the wooden steps, the snow closed in around them, cutting them off from the commotion at street level, and he glanced back for a final look around at the confusion above.

A knot of tension tightened itself in the pit of his stomach. The trio of Black Caps was unmistakably heading in

their direction, and he cursed himself for his stupidity. Of course, they'd send someone to secure the jetties too. If he and Hanna couldn't find a boat in the next few minutes they'd just walked into a trap.

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