

“All The Wight Moves”

A Blood Bowl short story by Adam Heterick

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He opened his eyes.

For what felt like the thousandth time that day he took quick stock of where he was. He checked his limbs were all still in the right place, then willed his body to move in the way of the opposing player.

The player in question, a black orc blocker with two messily daubed lines on his shoulder pad representing either a two or an eleven, took a menacing step forward. The orc threw a block, and he flew backwards, knocked over by the brute force, landing in a crumpled heap a yard or two from the line of scrimmage.

Arne Bartholomaeus opened his eyes, again.

Again he took stock quickly.

Limbs? Aye.

Opponent nearby? Aye.

Now he felt more capable. The body he was in control of *this* time was the corpse of Adalbert Hunter, former star blitzer for the East Ostermark Eagles. “The Hunter” they called him, before he was involved in a fatal training accident. After, they forgot him completely. But fans are fickle like that.

Arne had read the obituary and calmly made note of the funeral date. It wasn't every day a necromancer got to recruit a zombie with that much talent, and Arne was hardly going to be able to prove how capable a Blood Bowl coach he was with the slow moving stiffs he'd been able to raise from the grave so far.

And proving himself was exactly what he'd planned to do today. If he could beat the much-acclaimed Green Shades, a local black orc team that had been unbeaten for most of the regular season, he'd be a step closer to being able to put himself forward to take control of the Oldcastle Wights.

The Wights' old necromancer had been caught trying to rob some graves in a local cemetery, and subsequently burnt in the holy fire of the witch hunter who found him. This left the team in a state of flux, ready for a powerful presence to take control, literally.

Arne didn't think of himself as overly powerful. As things went he was rather new to death magic, but he was very opportunistic. That, coupled with his desire to get away from rural Ostermark, meant he would do anything to take over an already established team. Including stealing corpses of talented players that had died in various accidents on the pitch. And, of course, organising those accidents in the first place.

Adalbert Hunter had been renowned for his speed, his cunning and his footballer's brain. The first two of those, while diminished, were still present in his body. The last was on Arne's shelf in a jar. Nevertheless, Arne used that speed, surprising for a zombie, to lurch awkwardly toward the black orc, Two or Eleven, and block its path.

A feral grin spread across the orc's face, it rarely had victims line up to get twatted, but it was hardly going to turn the chance down. It raised a meaty fist to chop down and club the zombie into the dirt-

Arne now used the low cunning built into Adalbert's muscle memory, and made the walking corpse drop into a fetal crouch, forming an un-living speed hump, and tripping the surprised Two or Eleven over face first.

The orc thumped to the dirt, stunned.

Arne opened his eyes.

More correctly, Arne peered through the eye sockets of the skull he was currently inhabiting. He turned the skull upon its exposed vertebrae to look over to the black orc currently twitching on the ground after its neck had been twisted in the fall.

The corpse of Adalbert was crumpled under the orc, unable to move even if it had an animating force.

Arne was glad he swiftly extricated himself so he didn't experience being crushed under a wall of dark green flesh. He'd have his work cut out putting Adalbert back together, but that was all in a night's work for one such as he.

The skeleton of Vern Skulltaker, former lineman of the renegade chaos team, the Sword Coast Sabres, was in, for want of a better term, good condition. Compared to the zombies anyway. Every bone was present and intact. That meant it moved freely, so Arne moved freely from the wide zone into the centre of the pitch.

A goblin bruiser had been fumbling the ball back and forth as if it were a wayward bar of soap in a bathhouse. It looked at the approaching skeleton, yelped and finally picked the ball up. The goblin peeked about to see if his team was aware he had the ball. Like most greenskin teams, it seemed getting the ball was a secondary concern. A few black orcs had taken up with Arne's mummies, and the goblins were trying to prevent themselves from being beaten by both the opposition and their own team. The bruiser thought about his safety, and hatched a plan to get the ball away as swiftly as possible.

Vern rattled over to the goblin, arms outstretched menacingly. He attempted a tackle, bidden by Arne to get the ball free, but the slippery goblin merely stepped to the side, sniggering at the dead 'un as he did.

The goblin caught the attention of one of his kin, and ran to him, Vern in tow.

The other goblin noticed, and began to run. Having the ball and being chased by one the undead was not high on his list of things to do today. He'd just been told that there would be squig burgers if he wore the pads, took the field and didn't get stomped too bad. Although, given that most goblins' lists were thus: prank a big 'un, steal some teef, bully sumwun smaller, 'ave a kip; it didn't leave room for putting themselves in danger.

Arne, ever the puppeteer, maneuvered another skeleton into the path of both goblins. They baulked, caught in a two-way tackle, where both smaller players wanted to be rid of the ball, but were also terrified that the black orcs would eat them if they were responsible for losing the game.

They were in a predicament until Arne got overconfident. In forcing the skeletons together,

they had become entangled in each other's bones. Ribcage became attached to sternum, femur got stuck between tibia and fibula.

The goblins slipped away from the mass of bones that was now tumbling to the ground, but had few other safe places on the field to run to. The game had always had the potential to be a brawl, but now it appeared very unlikely that a game of blood bowl would be able to be salvaged from the mess.

The two skeleton body-pile broke apart as it struck the ground.

Arne opened his eyes.

The zombie rose from the ground and looked around. He'd been focussed on the melee with the ball carrier, but had also been puppeteering several other zombies and skeletons in their own pushing and shoving, and he surveyed the pitch. At least he could rely on a few members of the team to look after themselves, and those few, two mummies, a wight and a ghoul, had managed to bully the goblins, and pressured one of them into dropping the ball.

Helberecht the Ever, the one and only wight on the team, had then picked up the ball and stomped a goblin into the dirt simultaneously, but this burst of energy left the creature enervated. The cold blue glow from his eye sockets dimmed.

Arne quickly incanted the *Danse Macabre*, and the wight, now full of vigour, leapt over the prone greenskin, stiff-armed a black orc surprised at the undead's turn of speed, and came face to face with the Shades' surprise last line of defence.

The trained troll Mugurk had been drooling quietly to himself for the better part of the drive, wondering where all the dead 'uns had run off to. He'd slowly regained his wits as he had heard a few goblins scream in pain, then a blue glowy skully-boy had run straight at him. Mugurk couldn't believe his luck. He spread his arms, measuring a distance many throwers would be pleased to say was the length of their short pass. His wide embrace enveloped Helberecht and the tackle that ensued was rib-breaking.

The wight didn't really feel pain, not from something so mundane as a crushing tackle, but he certainly could notice his physical form losing strength and being damaged.

Arne, too, took notice.

He'd hoped to play a slow grinding game, stalling as long as he could, throwing his charges into the fray repeatedly to spoil the Shades' chances of scoring. He'd done well for the first half, and most of the second.

He almost had a flutter of excitement in his heart when the wight had ended up with the ball with only a confused troll barring the way. Almost, but it took a lot to make his heart beat in the iron box in which he kept it nowadays. That was short-lived. Helberecht was now almost crushed flat in the troll's arms.

Arne noted that he hadn't dropped the ball, however.

The ghoulish runner, Kraag, had been ragdolling a goblin's limp body around, enjoying being stronger than an opponent for once, when he felt a compulsion. He looked to where the troll stood, and saw the wight trying to get an arm free to offload the ball. Even though he wanted to fling the goblin about a bit more, he felt his master willing him to first get it, and then get it to the endzone.

Helberecht, nearly extinguished, had been wrenched and twisted, but remained resolute. Partly under his own dark willpower, and partly under that of Arne's, the wight held the ball in a vice-like grip. The troll continued to crush and grind his body, but still, he kept his hand on the ball and the ball free from the crush.

His gaze caught the ghoulish lolling toward him, and his rictus grin echoed the one on Arne's face in looks, if not sentiment. He moved his arm slightly- Mugurk noticed, slow-witted as he was. He grabbed Helberecht's forearm and pulled it back into the tackle.

At that moment, Kraag arrived, fingers splayed wide on both hands to grab the ball.

The ball however, was not forthcoming.

Try as he might, Helberecht could not force his rapidly crumbling bones to remain in control. His finger bones would not move. His humerus was being slowly broken by the troll. His animating spirit was waning. His grip was weakening. His desiccated ligaments were tearing.

His desiccated ligaments were tearing.

Arne knew all that was happening to his team.

He saw it, felt it, and he saw this.

Kraag felt the mental push again, and grinned at the unspoken permission he'd been given. He grabbed the wight's wrist, the limp hand weakly holding the ball below.

Kraag then pulled.

Helberecht watched impassively as the ghoulish beast started to damage his form. The blue glow fled his eyes-

The forearm broke free.

Kraag lurched back, ball, hand and forearm all now in his possession.

Mugurk looked around at the ghoulish, dropping the tattered body of the wight to the ground. He stepped forward-

Kraag stuffed the arm bone in his mouth and took to all fours, scuttling away toward the endzone.

The Troll looked to the ghoulish as if to make a blitz and stop the beast, then saw a butterfly and forgot everything but the way its wings flapped.

The ghoulish scored the touchdown and Arne breathed a sigh of relief. However, after that, there had been a brief challenge by the halfling referee. Apparently, if a player crossed the line holding a disembodied hand that was not theirs, that was holding the ball, it could be viewed by some as them not being in possession of the ball.

Also, apparently a mummy cracking its knuckles nearby can make a referee view things differently.

A one to nothing victory over a superior opponent would do well to show his talent. He'd just have to pull the team back together, literally in the case of Helberecht, and take on some more heavy-hitters. At which point he'd look to find another wight for the team. Maybe another ghoulish or two if he could catch them. After that, he'd be ready to track down the Oldcastle Wights.

Then he'd make some real moves.

Some real moves indeed.
