

"The Legend of Wretch"

A Blood Bowl short story by Adam Norton

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How do you measure greatness?

Is it your name scrawled in blood across the stands after a four nothing slaughter?

Is it how many opponents you literally slaughtered?

Is it the number of times your brain was slammed into the cage of your helm, only to be revived by a beautiful bloodweiser babes holding a thrashing mug of the nectar of the Nufflin gods?

No -- because you can't remember any of that anymore. It is one day, one game, one moment. Sometimes when the realmgates align, even the smallest of heroes can lay low the most colossal monster (usually a squig).

As time ticked down on the last drive of their last game of the season, the Mammoth Gray Rock-and-Ears needed that moment.

The Rottington No-Skins lined up in the 4-3 "death fence" like an implacable wall, mostly because they lacked the ability to understand placation.

Coach Tomb Landry, an ancient Wight King, who had expertly navigated the grid iron so long that he could measure the wind speed on the pitch by the sound of his femur rattling in his greaves (not to be confused with his grave; home sweet home).

His team was 8-1 in the league, only being outmaneuvered by the Phoenicium Swifthawks who had the audacity to pass the ball, as they passed the brawl.

That type of blood bowl made Landry's blood boil; or it would have, if he had any.

The No-Skins were facing off against the Rock-and-Ears, a team named after their rock hard heads -- they never considered the implications. What they lacked in coaching-- because they had eaten their last one -- they made up for in sheer

bone headedness.

The Rock-and-Ears had a typical "strategy" -- punch the other teams lights out, until the referees were able to mortally wound you into stopping. One of their star offensive players Chomp, a 12 foot Ogor named ironically after his empty smile, had been taken off the field after he choked on a mummy's loose wrapping, during a key drive up the center.

In an odd turn the referee screamed "Holding!!" and the 5 foot loss for an Ogor team was sizable.

Now down to 10 players, their only hope of remaining in the game entered onto the field to the deafening chattering of confused skaven and roaring Orc 'Ooligans alike.

A man-thing sized helmet wobbled to the line with a diminutive gnoblar underneath.

This was Wretch, the untasty, who had never been swallowed, no matter how many times he was lambasted in spices and boiled by local Butchers. Wretch pointed a nasty gnoblar knuckle at the crowd - the rest had been eaten - and yelled "Are you ready for some blood bowl?!" in a sing-songy twang.

Though familiar, no one knew where this demand came from and instead the stands screamed "HOBBLE THE GNOBLAR".

Wretch gulped, dribbling mucous out of his slack jaw.

Wretch had a dream, or was it a Waaaaagh!, he couldn't be sure.

Wretch always wanted to play Blood Bowl. He had been raised a few days ago watching the Rock-and-Ears smash, crash, and never dash, to loss after loss - it was glorious.

Wretch was swept up in the destruction and he gleefully fantasized about driving his tiny cleats into the piles of hewn chum left by these maniacal monsters.

However, he was far too pathetic and useless to ever be allowed to play.

Even the Rock-and-Ears former coach Mince Dumb-lardy, only saw Wretch as a meal that had somehow escaped his soup bowl -- before he himself was tragically eaten.

But the winds of fate were rattling the greaves of the greats and this was Wretch's time.

Lining up on the line of scrimmage he stared up into the unreadable eyes of the opposing blocker - a zombie named Lurch that hadn't noticed the bite sized morsel below him.

The whistle blew and Wretch pushed as hard as he could at the legs of the departed defender. The tibia cracked like Sigmar's lightning and Wretch effortlessly plunged past his defender. Landry's brow could not furrow, but the holes of his sunken skull fixed on Wretch.

No soul could escape his haunting gaze or his championship defence.

He directed a Wight Blitzter to butcher this bantam bandit.

But when the Wight went for it she woefully wobbled and like a weeping willow she fell onto her skull providing a ramp for Wretch to clamber over.

He was on the left flank of the 50 foot line completely undefended when the ball became loose near the center.

A mass grave had formed as skeletons dogpiled thrower Dim Deepbrow, who absentmindedly fumbled the squigskin while cracking heads.

Wretch knew that he was the only one aware of the rules of the game enough to do something.

He first ran in a zig-zarbag pattern as two skeletons shattered into each other.

Miles away a Necromancer watching in his cauldron cried a single blackened tear.

"What a waste of perfectly good bones" he said to no one in particular, as skeletons are terrible company.

Wretch ran back down the flank and was nearly distracted by the undead cheat team who had began a VanHel's Danse Macabre to get the ghouls going.

Wretch thought they were rotten -- and he was proven correct when another zombie jerked to tackle him, running smack into the Headless cheerleader, popping a boil that sprayed the first row of scowling Naggarites.

However, Grandfather Nurgle would not be the only god pleased that day.

Wretch yelled "ere we go" as he sailed back over the Wight he had previously hurtled and threw himself on top of the prolate spheroid (sorry... I bet a Collegiate Battle Wizard I could learn a new word every day).

Unfortunately for Wretch, and despite his foul flavour, Deepbrow was famished.

The brutish bruiser lifted Wretch high off the ground, along with the precious ball he was clutching.

Dim positioned Wretch above his gaping maw, and held him like a fist full of the popped Khorne being munched on in the stands.

Suddenly a ghoul blitzed up the field, falling over his fallen teammates scattered bones.

The delusional ghoul collided with Dim's gut, busting into the mighty ogor and causing him to wildly hurl the ball into the air.

Unfortunately for the Gnoblar he was still firmly affixed to the hurtling projectile.

Wretch used every ounce of his strength to grip the rocketing bullet as he shot through the wild soot yonder.

Sparks burned at him as he flew through the fire realms sky.

Wretch reflected on his brief and previously uneventful life, as the sound of caterwauling fans rapidly overtook his senses.

Suddenly he was touched by the twin greenskin gods.

He was suddenly the clever one, and not the brutal one.

He knew that the ball was headed to the endzone. If he could simply brace for impact he would be the first ever Rock-and-Ear to score a point in the history and prehistory of the game.

Chomp awoke with a splitting headache. Some bag of bones had screened his face with its bandages, causing him to choke on its mystical leaking sands of time.

He had never been knocked out, even when he would share hours of drunken 'eadbutts with his Mawtribe.

This made him furious. So did everything else, but this was no different.

The blistering bright lights of the stadium blinding him.

He stumbled to his feet and past the keening Branchwych healer.

He stumbled to what he thought were the sidelines and looked up at the burning skies of Aqshy. And then suddenly things went dark again and he was choking on something that tasted unfathomably repulsive.

The referee screamed "TOUCHDOWN".

LanDry appeared in a ghostly fire before him, freezing the referee to his marrow, cursing the human's soul as he sucked out his very essence.

A deep sound emerged from the unmoving chest of Tomb Landy, past Diesman Trophy Winner, and three time Carstein Ring recipient.

"There were too many players on the field".

Another referee, a 15 foot Kroxigor stomped over and begrudgingly began counting the players on the field. "There are 22 players on the field and one in the endzone. Looksssssss like a touchdown to me."

The Crowd was electric and only partly because the Stormcast Eternals had arrived to quell the hosts of chaos sacrificing other fans.

Two Ogors grabbed a keg of Krox'Gor-aid and with no coach to pour it on they threw it on themselves, suddenly smelling of sweetened swampwater.

Chomp, and therefore Wretch who resided in the Gutbuster's belly, was carried high by two of his teammates and then dropped by another Gnobblar named Norgurt (another story).

Chomo was championed as Most Volatile Puker (MVP) since he threw up everything except Wretch that day.

He went on to play for the Scream Bay Hackers, a much better Ogor team that were rumored to have read the rules of Bloodbowl at least once.

The final score that day was 3-1, an otherwise forgettable game in the grand scheme of the realms.

But in the Mammoth Gray Rock-and-Ears Hall of Maim that game is known as the legend of Wretch, the once swallowed.
