BACKSTORY

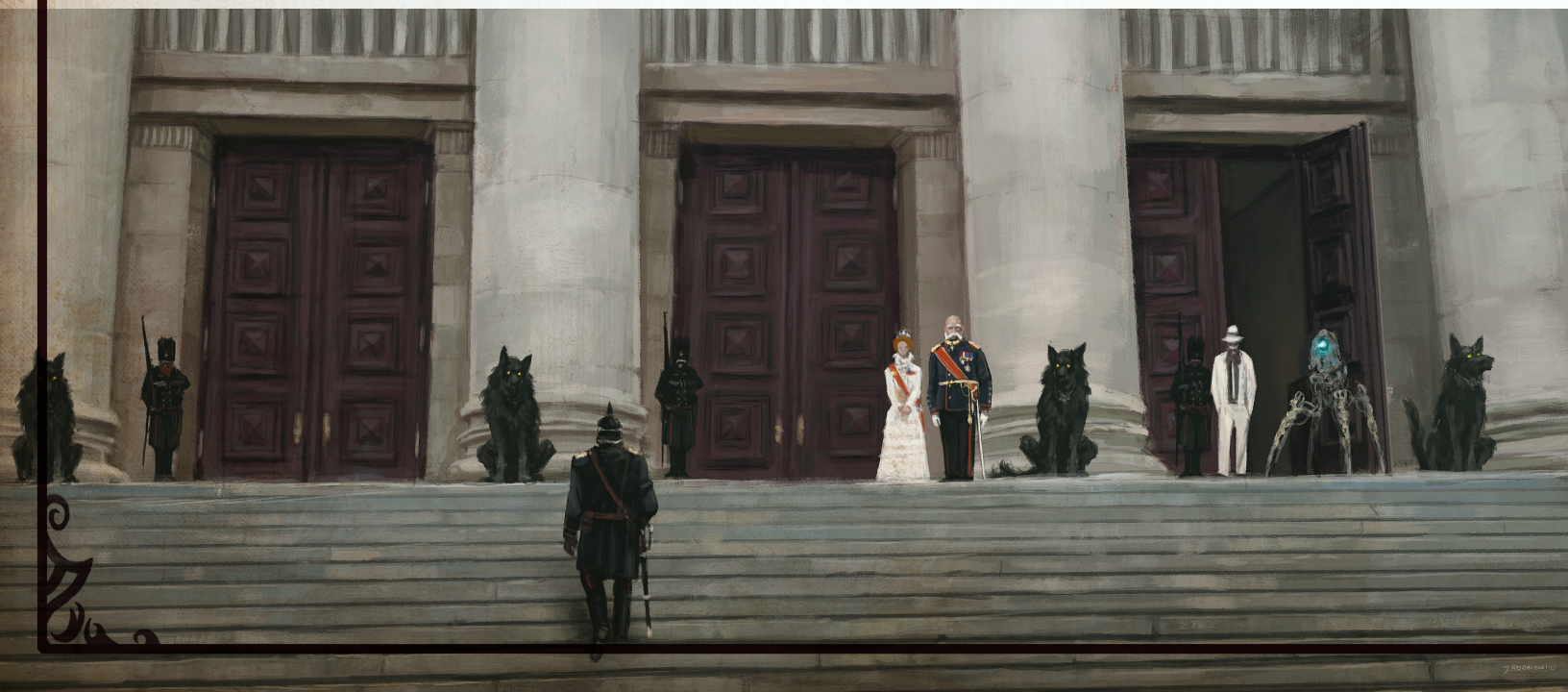
As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing with engineers and scientists testing the limits of power generated from steam, coal, and oil. Around the globe, nations raced to find the strongest and most efficient means of harnessing this power, and it seemed that every year a new technology revolutionized one industry or another. Farming, logging, mining—every industry was transformed, made more efficient and more lucrative. In the midst of this technological race, a scientist named Nicola Tesla brazenly squandered his life's savings—and the money of many investors—to build a town-sized "Factory" in the heart of Transylvania. Shortly after its construction, rumors began to flow from the Factory regarding the creation of wild experiments and fanciful machines, all of no discernable value.

Then, in 1901, an emissary from the "Factory" requested an audience with the Saxony emperor, offering him the chance to "be the first to witness the latest invention from the genius mind of Mr. Nicola Tesla—a world-changing creation, the likes of which has never been seen by humankind." The emperor, well aware of Tesla's reputation as a feckless dreamer, was amused by the audaciousness of the request and accepted, more out of curiosity than any belief in the emissary's claims. A month later, the emissary arrived, along with a small entourage transporting a large wooden crate. An air of spectacle hung around them, tinged with the confidence granted to one holding a precious secret. The emperor's curiosity was further piqued and he shifted slightly in anticipation. He knew the effect was pure theatrics, but he couldn't help the intrigue that slowly overtook him.

"If they are going to waste our time, I am glad they know how to put on a show while they are at it!" he chuckled to his wife. She smiled her condescending smile as she watched them position the crate for their grand reveal. Her husband had forced her to abandon a regular gathering to attend this farce, and she was eager for it to end.

The front of the crate had been loosened, and the emissary stood beside it and turned to face the emperor with a somber expression of reverence. Then, without further fanfare, the emissary spoke.

"Honorable Emperor of the great Saxony nation," he intoned solemnly, "I humbly submit, for your study and approval, the world's first automated walking machine." Untouched by the emissary, the front of the crate fell to the ground and from it emerged a four-legged machine. It was roughly the height of a man and moved on menacing, spider-like legs. It stopped, turned, and then climbed the steps toward the emperor, finally coming to a halt in front of the imperial court, silent but for the faint whir of machinery within. A hushed awe descended on those in attendance. Even the emperor's wife found her mouth—and her mind—stopped by what she witnessed.



"The great scientist Nicola Tesla has spent the last five years of life and livelihood perfecting the 'automachine,'" the emissary said with the quiet confidence of one unfazed by the powerful and influential. "Available as large-scale, manually-operated 'mechanized utility suits' or smaller, independent 'automachines' such as this one, Mr. Tesla has harnessed all forms of power known to man. Soon he will exploit those as yet unknown as well. In every way, he has proven himself the ultimate scientist and inventor. All other technology may remain useful, strictly speaking, but it is now rendered obsolete. The Factory is the womb from which the future is born. Automachines are the future. Tesla is the future."

The emperor stood stunned. *I am but a child*, he thought. *All I have ever known is as nothing.* He turned slowly from the automachine to face this emissary from "the future" who had upset his entire world view in mere seconds.

"Thank you for sharing this with me today," he managed, relying on his decades of training in decorum to reorient himself. "It is quite impressive."

"It is merely a prototype," the emissary said. "As we speak, Mr. Tesla continues to improve his designs and to create new visions to reshape the world."

"I see," replied the emperor, "And these . . . automachines, you call them? They can replace the equipment we have now?"

"For smaller tasks, yes, the automachines may help in a variety of ways. For more taxing work, such as logging or mining, the large "mechanized utility suits," which require an operator, are more suitable. They can be configured to suit any purpose."

"Any purpose?" the emperor inquired. A faint smile appeared on the emissary's face.

"Any purpose."

The emperor's mind adjusted to the new world order surprisingly quickly. The promise of these machines serving "any purpose" sparked his imagination and his mind raced ahead to envisage the seemingly limitless possibilities.

"Is the esteemed Mr. Tesla seeking further investors?" he asked. The emissary's smile grew slightly.

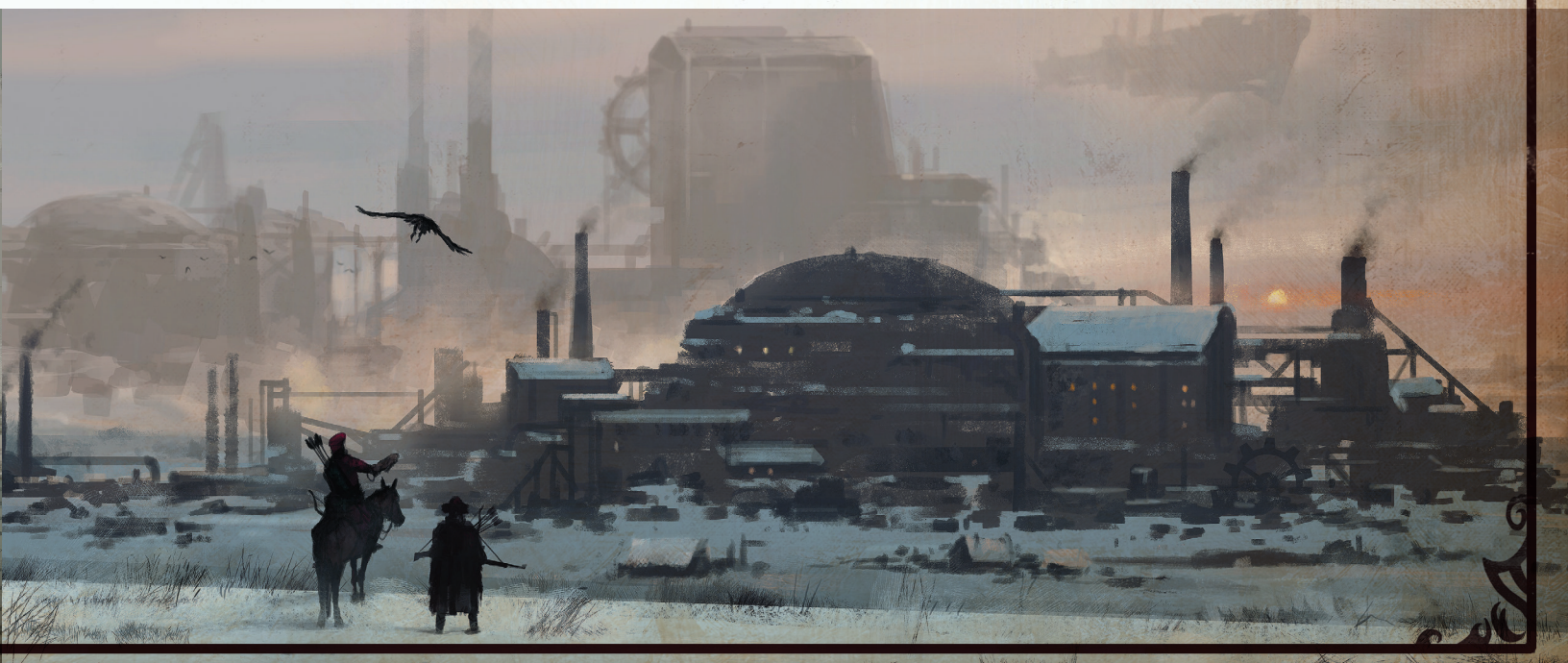
"Mr. Tesla is open to new business relationships," he replied.

"And am I the first to see this invention?" The emperor's greed began to grip him. The emissary nodded. "Are there plans to share this with others?"

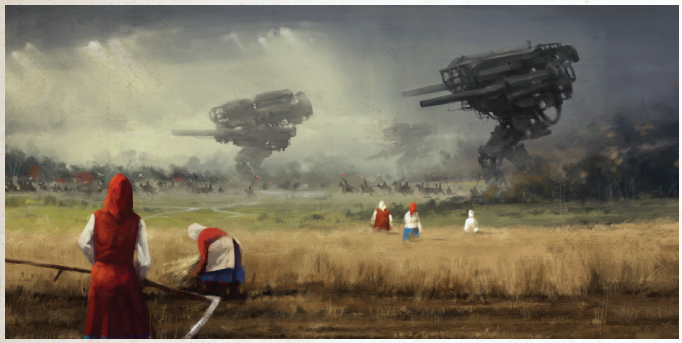
"Several such displays have already been arranged. Emissaries are transporting prototypes throughout Europa and will be meeting with the heads of other nations over the coming days and weeks."

So time is critical, the emperor thought. He smiled his most diplomatic smile.

"Thank you again for this impressive display. I would be most honored if you would join me for dinner to discuss these matters further."



The automachine demonstrations had the desired effect. Although the prototypes sent to the nations of Europa were largely novelties, they captured the imaginations of all who saw them and many who didn't. Word spread quickly, and excitement grew to obsession over this new, largely unknown, and hardly understood technology. Every nation saw the possibilities presented by these mechanical wonders and soon they had all negotiated contracts with the Factory and had sent representatives to oversee the design of their own unique automachines and mechanized utility suits, customized for specific purposes, and to national aesthetics. The productivity gain possible in every industry was obvious from the outset, but it was the machine's defensive potential that generated the most excitement among the leaders of many nations. And excitement led to funding.



The mechanized utility suits, or "mechs," were more versatile, more powerful, and more imposing, and they became the focus of nations looking to defend themselves against their neighbors' hostile intentions, real or imagined. After the Factory's initial commissions were delivered, it became clear to Tesla that he could not keep up with the ever-growing demand, so he reluctantly took the advice of his daughter and sold the nations license to use his patents. However, he steadfastly insisted on selling only the more primitive designs used in the early commissions, saving the more advanced mechs and automachines for use at his own discretion. With these licensed patents, every nation began churning out armies of the lumbering mechs, while Tesla continued to amass a fortune that was rumored to rival that of entire countries.

In just a few years, the presence of mechs and automachines had become a mainstay in even the most idyllic countryside. The increased production had driven down the cost of the older, smaller mechs used as tools for work, and many of Europa's wealthier landowners had long since added entire stables of mechs to their farming, logging, and mining equipment. But these lowered costs were only made possible by an industry of war-ready monstrosities that was growing in size and quantity. The public became accustomed to these new tools and hulking war machines with surprising speed. Most still could not comprehend the machines, but they were seen, accepted, and before long passed into familiarity. Some complained of the noise or the smell or the oil polluting the land. Some argued for the "old ways," claiming that faster and more powerful was not always better. An ox-and-plow, a hand-pulled saw, a horseback cavalry—these engendered feelings of dignity and honor to some, and these new machines represented a dark and grimy future, full of terrifying unknowns. Yet these voices were rarely heard, and even more rarely given credence by those in positions of power.

There were exceptions though. The Khan of Crimea appreciated the agricultural benefits these new tools offered, but he was wary of over-reliance on them. It was his brash, bold daughter who stood transfixed by the machines, and it was she who saw their neighbors vastly improve their weapons of war and feared being left behind. In the end, the Khan loved his daughter more than the methods of the past, and he gave in to her insistence that they "modernize." The young and the powerful saw excitement and potential in these mechs, and they rushed headlong into the inevitable end of all technological revolutions.

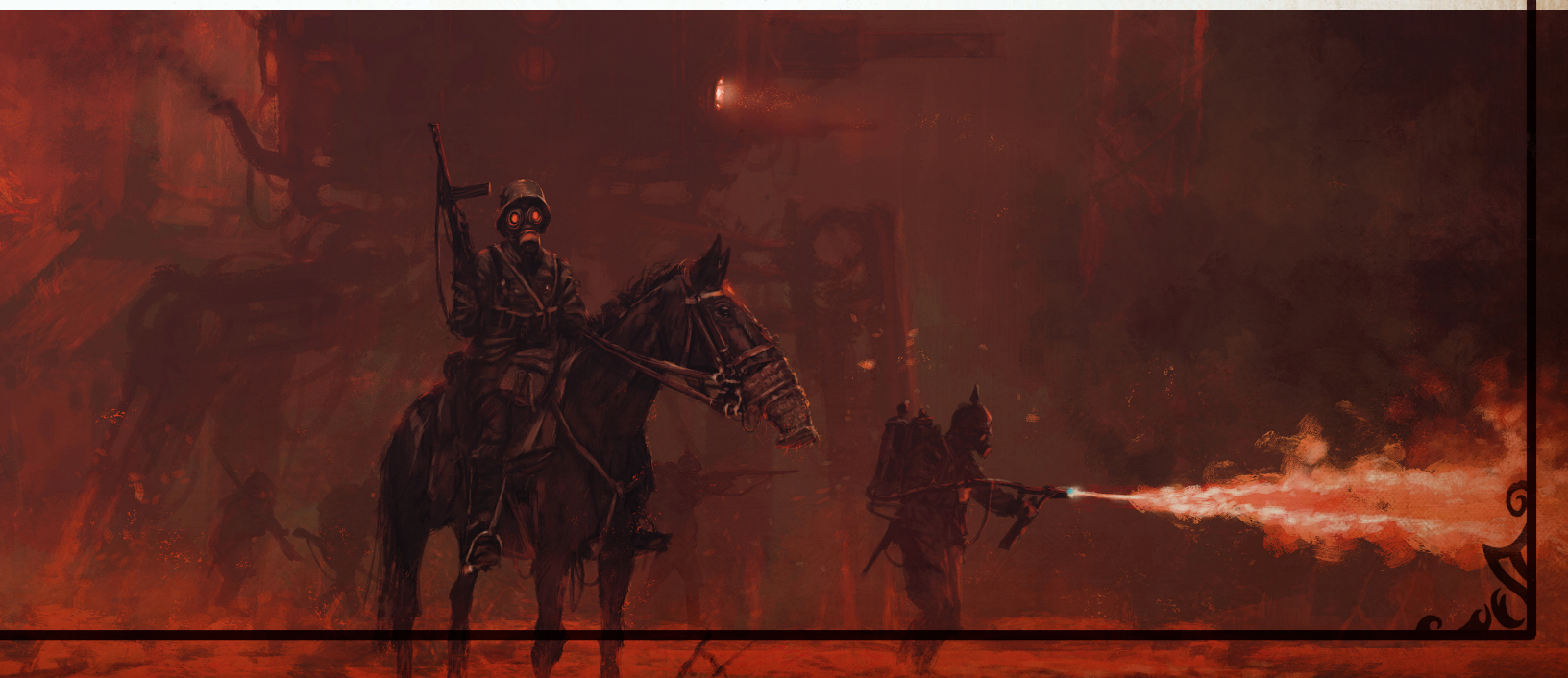
In 1910, the tsar of the Rusviet Union narrowly survived an assassination attempt. The assassin escaped, but Grigori Rasputin, the tsar's trusted advisor, claimed to have seen the accused and sent his men to track him down. Several days later, Rasputin produced a body bearing documents with the seal of the Republic of Polania, who, he said, had confessed to the assassination attempt before being executed. Polania denied these "vile, baseless accusations." Outrage at the attack and brazen denial grew throughout the Union, until only a few weeks later, Rusviet soldiers shot and killed several Polanian engineers in the vicinity of the Factory. The Republic of Polania bristled at this violation, and before long, militias were instigating skirmishes between the two nations as the people cried out for vengeance.

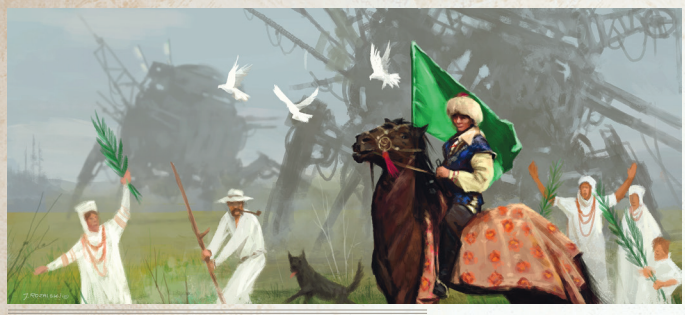
Europa had reached a tipping point. Flush with nearly a decade of prosperity, and eager to test the might of their newly assembled war machines, it took no time at all for these isolated skirmishes to stoke the fears of people across the continent, and they clung to their patriotism in response. Nations began engaging in more overt border struggles. Any slight, real or imagined, between rival merchants became a matter of national pride, security, and prosperity. Any opportunity to test a new weapon or claim a new plot of land evolved into a key operation in the name of national defense. Just a few months after the attempted assassination of the Rusviet tsar, the Great War had begun.

It had seemed so glamourous during the early skirmishes of the Great War, but no one was prepared for war on an industrial scale. In their eagerness to experiment with new weapons and tactics, Europa's generals did not consider the scope or consequence of their actions. In the opening months of the war, all the people saw were images of heroics and triumph. The new weapons were spectacular, awe-inspiring, and utterly horrifying. The mechs caused destruction that the mind could not fathom, and by the time they had come to terms with their new capabilities, every nation was so afraid of the terrific weapons of their enemies that they refused to stop using their own.

So the war dragged on, year after year. Death tolls registered in the tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands. Civilians could do nothing but stand and watch and hope fate did not deliver them into the path of these warring juggernauts.

As the spring of 1916 gave way to an early summer, the war efforts escalated once again. This time, though, there was a sense of finality. It permeated everyone, from high-ranking tacticians, through to peasants working in the fields, and although there was no visible difference in the physical state of the world, the air seemed to hum with decisiveness. The people, the soldiers, and the leaders were tired of this war. The major players of the Great War limped through the summer of 1916, mustering the remnants of their forces and steeling themselves for the war's climax. Then, as though in response to some unseen signal, they all heaved forth in one final, violent outburst that was the Great War's death rattle. When the oily smoke cleared, only desolation remained, and the survivors crawled home, listless and broken.





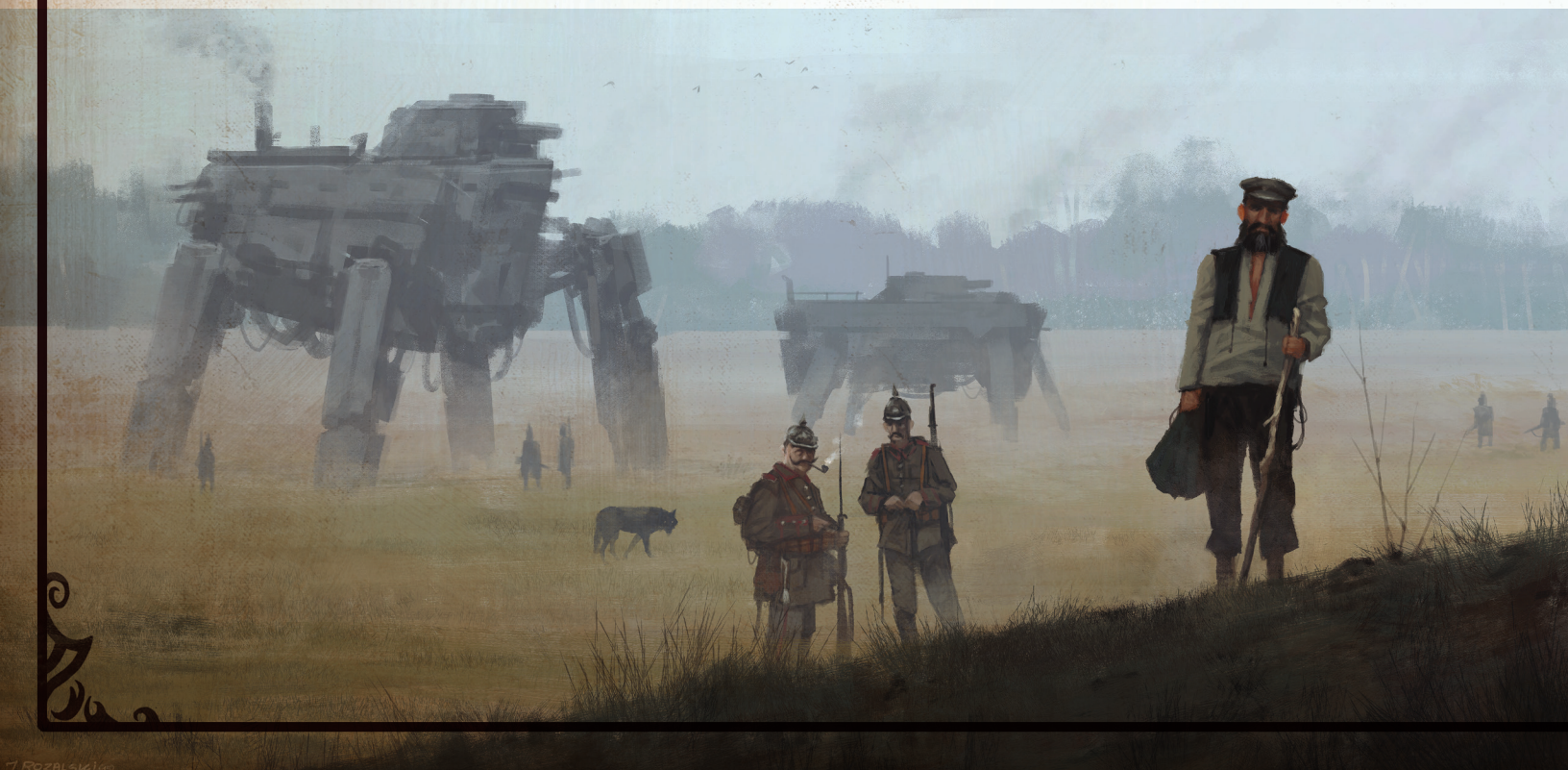
The Great War had crippled every nation involved. Bereft and exhausted, the public met the end of the war with stunned and cautious relief. In the first few weeks of the cease-fire, most expected hostilities to reignite at any moment. Gradually, they became more comfortable, and even hopeful. Then, a few weeks after the fighting ceased, formal truces were announced between several of the nations.

For now, it seemed, the rulers and politicians had had their fill of war, and the citizens of their nations were all too happy to begin the rebuilding effort. However, the military leaders of the world would not forget the lessons they learned, and the new technologies developed during the Great War would not simply sit in the armories, gathering dust.

From the outset, Tesla had known that his machines had the potential for death and destruction. But in his eagerness to test his inventions, and to finally profit on their potential after so many years of ridicule and financial losses, he never truly considered the devastating potential of his designs.

In his mind, the machines' capacity for destruction had been theoretical at best. He raced ahead of the world's leaders in his eagerness to explore his technology. Where they sought power, he simply sought the limits of his ability.

Perhaps he had simply envisioned one mech squaring off in an honorable battle against another, like dueling knights in greasy, mechanized armor, with the casualties being counted in replacement parts and oil stains, and maybe even the occasional killed operator. Perhaps he had never imagined them in actual battle at all, but it seemed clear that he never imagined these industrial war machines pitted against human flesh.



Whatever he imagined, it did not match reality. His mechs were certainly used in battle, but they never replaced soldiers and cavalry. They supplemented them. And they overpowered them.

Tesla did not entirely believe the early reports from his ambassadors regarding the destruction being wrought by his machines. Who would send soldiers into battle alongside these behemoths? Were they madmen? The war's early reports had told of scores of soldiers slaughtered in mere moments.

As the years wore on, tactics adapted, but it was rare for infantry or cavalry to survive more than a few battles in which the mechs were involved. However, it was the civilian casualties that pushed Tesla over the edge. The armies had shown little discretion in applying their new machines of death and there were unending reports of farms targeted for attack, or nearby villagers simply getting caught in the crossfire.

Eventually, Tesla had to see for himself, and he left his work and his Factory and toured the countryside.

He saw bodies everywhere.

Soldiers.

Horses.

Farmers.

Families.

Children.

And he realized that these were just the ones that had not been retrieved yet, lying in fields, ditches, streams, barns, houses.

He reeled. Some say he went mad. Whatever the case, he retreated to the Factory, ceasing all manufacturing and dismissing his workers. He took his daughter, closed the Factory doors, and together they disappeared.

This is where the story of Scythe began. Scythe started with the core game, expanded with Invaders from Afar, and took to the skies with The Wind Gambit. Now it is time to complete the Scythe expansion trilogy.

WELCOME TO THE RISE OF FENRIS.