

## MOMiTs Gone Wild!

### MOMiTs give their take on ... everything.

- [home](#)
- [tags](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Feed](#)

May 02

2009

[Escape from](#)

[Gnomeregan - Part III](#)

Posted by

[admin](#) in

*Untagged*

⊖



## Escape from Gnomeregan

### Part III

When Hamfred came to he was still in the Clean Zone, but there were far fewer gnomes around. Keto was there, his red, curly hair matted to his head with sweat, and next to him was Emi Shortfuse, but most of their fellow civilians were gone. The stairs leading out of the Clean Zone going up to the Clockwerk Run as well as those leading down towards the Dormitories and lower levels were still guarded by grim faced gnome warriors, and a few stone-faced technicians and medics stood by the various cleaning machines, but looking down the steps the green gas was nowhere to be seen - apparently he'd been out for quite a few minutes.

Seeing him conscious again, Keto interrupted what Emi was saying and hurried across the room to stand at his side.

"They've abandoned Tinker's Court - Mekkatorque came over the intercoms a few minutes ago and sounded the evacuation code signal. The upper levels are still completely overrun: the venting didn't stop the troggs at all - it just . . . well, irritated them."

"Irradiated them, you mean," Hamfred said, but nobody got his joke. Still, past his sizable headache he felt a tight knot in the pit of his stomach.

"They're saying we've got to abandon Gnomeregan!" Keto said again, with desperate emphasis.

"You missed the fireworks," Emi Shortfuse said, coming over. "The motor relays broke and the entire Tram power assembly went up with a sound like Blackrock Mountain erupting. The Upper and Lower Hall of Gears are blasted to scrap, and the leaking transcapicator fluid has animated into some kind of radioactive slime dripping into the lower chambers." Hamfred was staggered - his city was falling to pieces.

Emi Shortfuse looked at him oddly for a moment, and then asked, "You're a Bubblecork, aren't you?"

"Yes" both he and Keto replied simultaneously. Keto's voice had a sharp edge to it, and Hamfred knew he was touching on defensive anger.

Emi just nodded, though. "I knew your Father - good gnome."

"By the Light, Father!" Keto said suddenly, but Emi shook her head reassuringly.

"They'd have emptied all the care facilities' patients to other Clean Zones before the venting, and it sounds like the plan is to regroup in Ironforge. As many gnomes as could get out by portal are probably already there, seeking help from the dwarves."

Hamfred felt a bit easier, and he could see Keto's relief, too. Of course, whatever had happened to their Father, it was too late for them to change anything now - there was little enough they could do to help themselves. But he grasped onto something else Emi had just said - mages. Of course they could open portals to any of the capital cities. Suddenly the power to teleport around the world sounded like a rare and wonderful freedom.

"Are there still mages evacuating the city?" he asked, hopeful, but Keto and Emi both shook their heads.

"We heard there was one evacuating the southern Clean Zone," Keto said, "but that whole area is cut off by cave-in now. The High Tinker and his court probably all got out by portal, too - chain of command and whatnot, but we haven't heard anything but troggs for the past half hour."

"Is that how long I was out?" he asked incredulously.

"Little longer, actually," Keto said.

"Hope the medics did a good job on your head," Emi said, gently touching the bandage around his temple. "Cause the only way out of the city now is a run through the trogg infested Clockwerk Run to the Train Depot, and then to the elevator."

"What about the Workshop exit, though," he asked, trying to get his mind working again. "Without power, the tram is out, and if there's no mages to port us than that's out too, but given a choice between running through the entire Clockwerk Run dodging irradiated troggs, and having to avoid a few puddles of radioactive goo - I'm thinking the troggs aren't the way to go. Besides, if we can get to the Launch Bay, there's always the chance we can hop a bomber out of here."

"A bomber?" Emi said with a little laugh. "Who's gonna fly it, Bubblecork - you?"

"You bet - my brother and I aren't such bad pilots, and most of the takeoff sequence is automated . . ."

"The sanitation equipment is tracking safe radiation levels in the lower levels now," Keto cut in, excited, "And there's even some chance there's still gnomes alive down there. I like that idea a whole lot better than dodging troggs left and right all the way to the elevator."

Emi just shook her head. "Good luck to you, then, because I'm headed upstairs. I might even peek into the abandoned tram tunnel, too; I've gathered some explosives, and if I can collapse the troggs entry point, there's a fair chance we can retake the city."

Keto looked torn for a moment, and Emi must have read what Hamfred did in his little brother's face, because she went on, "Listen, there's nothing you can do to help right now except get to safety." Pointing to the armed gnomes in the room, she went on, "There's some hold out forces here to help keep the fires lit, but we're going to need outside help to clean this mess up, and there's no telling how long it's going to take coming. Get out while you still can."

Keto nodded, and Hamfred silently thanked Emi for letting his brother off the hook. He agreed that the city's only chance was outside help at this point, and he wasn't too proud to flee to get it.

"We'd . . . um . . . better try to get out of here quickly," he said lamely.

Emi looked at the two of them doubtfully, but nodded.

"Good luck to you both."

"Good luck to you," he answered, and then she turned away and went over to a few of the holdout technicians to start organizing her explosives. Looking at Keto, he said with a shrug, "Now or never, I guess."

Keto nodded, and the two of them descended the steps into the dormitory courtyard, skirting along the wall to avoid the Alarm-O-Bomb units. Hamfred figured they'd be keyed to ignore

gnomes, but he figured it didn't pay to take any chances.

Flitting around a corner and moving down a short hallway away from the dormitories, they entered the lower Hall of Gears - or at least what was left of it. Scrap metal littered the floor in twisted heaps where the floor of the upper chamber had collapsed. The gigantic, cylindrical core of the Tram power assembly was sheared clear in half, a split column that no longer supported the main weight of the chamber above. What was visible of the floor of the room was dirty with grease and spilled oil, and the fumes of transcapicator fluid. Light flooded into the room from above, but it was diffused by particles of dust and debris in the air giving everything in the room a greenish-yellow tint.

He grabbed Keto's arm and started skirting around the circular room to the left, avoiding most of the debris and wreckage in the middle of the room, but stopped after only a few steps as a blobbish mass of undulating ooze slithered from behind a piece of crumpled metal. Nearly as tall as he was, the thing was neon green, and the air around it buzzed as if it were surrounded by invisible bees. Worse, through the transparent membrane of the creature, bits of partially disintegrated gnomes were visible.

"That's thing's been eating gnomes!" Keto said in a harsh whisper, digging into his pack.

"More likely it just oozed over a body," Hamfred replied, unwilling to attach any sinister intelligence to what appeared to be no more than a gigantic shambling mass of animate phlem. Still, the thing was moving in their direction, and was definitely not what he'd pictured when Emi had said 'animated fluid'.

Keto had drawn one of the explosives from his pack, though, and seemed determined to lay waste to the irradiated slime. Releasing the safety, Keto hurled the explosive at the thing, hitting it at its base. For a moment, the slime stopped, and Hamfred could see the mithril casing of the explosive sinking through the ooze's membrane before the device detonated with a roar, blasting bits of radioactive gel and the contents of the thing's innards about the room.

Wiping bits of green ooze, oil, and gnome bits off of himself, he looked at Keto and said flatly, "You know, the explosives work just as well when thrown from a greater range."

Keto grinned, wiping himself off, but whatever he was going to answer was cut off by the sound of massed bubbling, and they looked up to see nearly half a dozen more irradiated slimes moving from various portions of the room directly towards them.

"Run!" he yelled, and raced ahead of Keto around the circumference of the room.

The oozes were faster than he'd have given them credit for, and looking back, he saw them closing the distance as Keto let fly another explosive, missing the slimes and detonating a pile of fallen rock and metal. Despite the miss, however, Hamfred saw each of the oozes immediately alter course for the explosion, and he whispered to Keto, "They're attracted to the noise, or the flash, but either way . . ."

Keto nodded, and as the oozes abandoned the crater where the last blast had hit and started moving back towards them, he hurled another bomb as far back across the room as he could, spraying more debris in the explosion, but luring the oozes far away from them.

"Nice shot," he congratulated his brother, racing away again around the room.

As he reached the exit tunnel, he looked back for the oozes and saw them moving mindlessly towards them, still in hot pursuit. The hallway overlooked a wide, shallow service trench to their right, but was otherwise a straight shot to the Launch Bay. Keto was pulling another explosive from his pack when they heard shuffling footfalls from farther up the corridor as a cadre of gnome sentries came into view. Wearing armored suits and carrying rifles, the gnomes had a sickly, jaundiced look as if suffering from sickness. Some of the gnomes' skin looked blistered and peeling off, too, but if there were gnomes alive down here - even sick ones -, their chances of escape were getting better and better.

"Help, there're oozes after us," he hollered, and the two gnomes closest to them crouched down into firing positions.

The third gnome defender was looking at them quizzically, while the fourth shouted out, "This sickness clouds my vision, but I know they must be troggs. Die foul invaders!" He hefted his rifle to his shoulder.

"Wait, we're not troggs!" Keto shouted, but the gnomes opened fire. A bullet whizzed through the air scant inches from Hamfred's face, as Keto cried out in pain and clutched his arm. Worse, the oozes were nearly on them from behind, so in a fit of desperation, Hamfred grabbed the explosive Keto had out and hurled it just ahead of the gnome defenders - out of blast range, he hoped - before pushing Keto over the edge and tumbling the two of them into the service trench.

They landed with matched grunts as the explosion sounded in the corridor above them, followed by the bubbling of oozes charging the blast, and the repeated sounds of rifle fire as the gnomes shot and fell back away from the oozes. Keto's face was pale and his left hand was still clamped over his right arm, but he whispered, "They must have been exposed to the radiation, and it's somehow . . ." he groped for the right word.

"They're sick," Hamfred agreed. "Their skin looks almost like they're afflicted by some kind of leprosy, but I've never heard of leprosy afflicting the mind. But we'll have to worry about them later. If anyone else is alive down here, we can't trust that they're not infected, too."

Looking up and down the service trench, he wracked his memory of the city's blueprints, and then nodded in the direction the leprous defenders had gone.

"We can follow this trench to the . . ." he started, then noticed blood pouring from his brother's arm. With a small cry, he crawled over to Keto and tried to staunch the bleeding pouring freely from the bullet wound in his upper arm.

"It'll be ok for now," Keto said as he finished wrapping the wound, but Hamfred wasn't sure. He needed a medic, a priest, or both and soon.

Glancing down at the poorly made cloth bandage covering the bullet hole, Keto said with a wry

smile, "Though I think you might need to work on your first aid skills."

Hamfred smiled back at his brother. "Are you ok to go?"

Keto nodded, and the two of them stumbled to their feet, moving cautiously down the service trench towards the Launch Bay. The lip was a good 6 feet - far too high for a gnome to reach without a ladder, and with Keto's injured arm, Hamfred didn't think they'd be able to boost each other up, either. But if memory served, this trench would deposit them where they wanted to go anyway, so he crossed his fingers and hoped nothing was between them and their destination.

After a few minutes, he could see the Launch Bay lights up ahead, and the service trench was becoming increasingly shallow. Pressed against the trench wall where it became lower, he tried to stay hidden as he moved into a position where he could look out at the Bay. Shock and disbelief momentarily filled him as he peeked out.

The Launch Bay was completely undamaged, and was still apparently manned by a full complement of gnome mechanics, assistants, and defenders. But each of the dozens of gnomes in the room had the sickly yellow look of the leprous defenders from before. It was like a horrible dream, with the familiar place the same but the occupants all corrupt, sinister versions of themselves. Lowering his head below the lip, he looked to Keto and summed up.

"Most of the Bombers are here and intact by the look of things, too, but the place is manned by dozens of leper gnomes. I'm betting they don't take to us any better than the ones upstairs."

Keto's waxy face drooped at the news, and he asked, "What are we going to do?"

There wasn't much choice as Hamfred saw it. It was too dangerous to go back, if there was even a way to safely get out by the elevator. The Bombers were here, and if they could get aboard one, the automated preflight would maneuver them to the flight deck and they could boost their way out into the free skies above from there. It was just a matter of getting to the plane.

"We get the plane, and we get out of here."

"How?" Keto asked desperately. "The Bombers on the runway have their ordinance loaded already, so no way I'm tossing explosives around in there, even if we did have enough left to take out all of the lepers. Once those diseased gnomes see us, they're gonna gun us down, or bludgeon us to death with wrenches, or whatever . . ."

Hamfred reached into his pack, unwrapping the belt nestled on top and clicking it securely in place around his waist.

"I'll go, with the Invulnerability Belt. I'll lead them away from the nearest Bomber, and you can hop in and start the autoflight sequence. Once you start to taxi towards the launch chute, I'll hop aboard, and we escape. It'll be cake."

Keto just looked at him for a moment, his eyes going from Hamfred's face to the thorium-link belt and back again. His face tightened, but Hamfred knew his brother was realizing there was no other choice.

"At least let me wear . . ." Keto started, but Hamfred cut him off.

"No way. The belt is my gamble, and that's that."

When Keto finally nodded, Hamfred steeled himself to activate the belt and start his run, but before he could he heard a shout from the Launch Bay nearby and gunfire hitting soft, gooey bodies. Risking a peek, he saw that from an octagonal-shaped archway headed back towards the Hall of Gears, a host of irradiated oozes - probably the same ones he set on the leprous defenders before - had made their way to the Launch Bay. Bits of partially digested gnome floated inside several of the oozes, and to Hamfred's amazement, all of the mechanics and defenders charged the oozes, one of them shouting, "The troggs . . . they never stop coming. Die trogg! Die!"

As the leper gnomes cleared out, Hamfred saw a flight-ready Bomber completely unguarded just twenty or thirty feet away. Not waiting to question their good fortune, he looked to his brother and said simply, "Come on Keto, we're going!"

Helping his brother to his feet, the two haggard gnomes stumbled out onto the well-lit underground platform of the domed room. Hamfred glanced towards the ceiling over the Launch Platform at the launch valve, but it looked undamaged, thank the Light. The Launch Bay was designed with a single take-off and landing chute to the surface ovetop the circular platform built raised up in the center of the Bay itself. If Hamfred's calculations were correct, and he believed they were, the Bomber's autopilot would power up the ship as one of the great mechanical cranes positioned around the room automatically maneuvered them onto the Launch Platform. From there, the valve would open automatically, and they'd just ascend skyward up the chute to freedom.

Almost to the bomber he cried out in pain, clutching his shoulder where a thrown wrench had hit him. He leaned up against the wing of the Bomber to steady himself, as Keto painfully struggled up towards the cockpit. Looking around quickly, he saw the leper gnomes had finished with the oozes, and were charging back across the room towards them. Several of them were apparently throwing tools, but it was the Peacekeeper Security Suit charging over with them that Hamfred realized was the real threat.

Wasting no time and ignoring the pain in his shoulder - a nice counter throb to his still-aching head - he hopped up onto the wing and helped his brother pull back the cockpit glass, sliding into the navigator's seat and flipping the auto-engage switches. Keto hopped into the pilot seat and activated the autoflight sequence. Almost immediately one of the mammoth robotic arms pivoted over to their ship, and grasping it, lifted it clear of the Launch Bay floor just as the heavily armed Peacekeeper Security Suit had been about to reach them. Screwdrivers and wrenches bounced harmlessly off the heavy flyer's plating, but leprous defenders were now bringing their rifles to bear, and a bullet shattered the glass of the cockpit.

Wishing the mechanical claw would move them faster to deposit them in launch position, he saw the launch chute door slide open above them and heaved a mental sigh of relief. That had been his biggest fear, that the doors had malfunctioned somehow. He heard Keto's groan a moment later though, and seeing the other gnome's eyes on the Launch Platform, looked in mounting alarm at the fully armed and active Electrocutoner 6000 defense robot, it's spider-like metal body bobbing up and down slightly, its weapons trained on the Bomber to destroy it the

moment it was set down on the Launch Pad. Hamfred was soaked by icy beads of sweat as he futilely tried to focus his mind.

"Break us free of the crane!" Hamfred shouted, seeing only one way out.

Understanding as the crane began to lower them down into range of the Electrocutoner 6000, Keto kicked up the throttle and rocked the Bomber left, than right, the boosters firing with increased power. Metal groaned from the crane, and as the defense robot realized what they were doing, it charged a megavolt of electricity, blasting a lightning bolt at them that exploded against the thorium plating of the Bomber, searing the nose of the craft and left the air around them crackling with ozone.

But the armor held, and with a last heave from the Bomber's engines, Keto finally managed to break them loose from the crane, shooting them across the room. He wheeled them around through the flak from of rifle fire and another megavolt from below, and then pulled up away from the launch platform, up the launch chute towards the starry sky above. But, as they boosted upwards, rocketing up the long tube towards the lip of the chute and freedom, Hamfred felt the bomber jarred heavily by a blast from below and realized Electrocutoner hadn't given up - and worse, the Bomber's armor wasn't going to save them from another hit.

Looking over the side down the chute for the defense robot, he saw the Electrocutoner 6000 charging to blast a final megavolt. Judging from their speed and the distance remaining, it would destroy them before they could escape. The fresh smell from above was the crisp, snowy air of the mountains of Dun Morgoth, tantalizingly close, but not close enough.

Looking at the shredded thorium plating where one of the megavolts had hit, Hamfred felt a sudden flash of inspiration, and popped open the buckle of his belt, deftly pulling two coils from the relay and pressed them to the metal sides of the cockpit, activating the belt a scant second before the megavolt hit. Immediately the belt flashed as it absorbed the electricity through the Bomber's frame, powering its servos and the delicate arcanite converter within to full power and beyond, enveloping them in a protective shield as they were blasted by the tremendous force of the attack out the top of the chute into the open air above.

Staring in mute wonder at the skies around them in the predawn light, he could see a flickering

bubble of force around their silently gliding craft.

Turning to Keto with his face lit with a foolish grin, he shouted, "It worked! The Belt worked!"

Keto's idiot grin mirrored his own, and Hamfred savored the feeling the cold, brisk mountain air whipping past them through the shattered cockpit, letting out a cheer as he yelled, "We're free!"

"Hooray!" Keto cheered, then yelled "Your Invulnerability Belt was . . ." but suddenly stopped. Looking back, Hamfred saw Keto quizzically regarding the bomber's unresponsive controls, and realized what he'd been hearing as they glided through the air - nothing. The Bomber's engines were shot, demolished by the final blast that the belt had . . . well . . . almost protected them from.

"Huh," Hamfred said as Keto glided the plummeting craft towards a large snow drift for a crash landing. "Maybe we'll have to market it as the 'Nigh-Invulnerability' Belt."

He and Keto were both still laughing when the Bomber flumped down in the cold, soft snow on the outskirts of Ironforge.

□ *Fin* □

[del.icio.us](#) · [digg this](#) · [spurl](#) · [reddit](#) · [furl this](#)

[\[ Back \]](#)