

# RUST, BOMBSHELLS, AND RICHES

A COLLECTION OF STORIES AND ART FROM  
THE PEOPLE OF AZEROTH

A WORLD OF WARCRAFT FANZINE PROJECT

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# **FOREWORD**

You know what's fun? Explosions, violence, racing, chasing, and sticking it to the man. Do you ever just want to go apeshit, cut loose, and do something wild and unpredictable?

Heh, haven't we all? It doesn't matter how old or comfortable we get in our lives. There's always this feeling in the back of our minds that makes us yearn for rebellion and doing something to get the adrenaline rushing. Thankfully, World of Warcraft allows us to break out of our routine and do something crazy.

And that's precisely what this issue is dedicated to—for all of us who love adventures, getting into shenanigans, and daring to be bombastic. So go on out there, be ungovernable, choose violence, and don't let anyone tell you what to do! Because, pal, we only have one life, so make it a good one. Don't forget to take pictures.

**~ Rease Stoneheart**



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# COLD NIGHT IN UNDERMINE PART I

Written by Rease Stoneheart



*Note: This is Part 1 of a 6-part serialized story.*

**It was a dark, cold night in Undermine**—or as dark and cold as one could get without any actual weather. The sun never set mainly due to the fact that it was bolted on the ceiling, and some poor bastard was paid to move it occasionally. No wind ever blustered and whispered around.

Everything was as stagnant and rotten as the people beneath the ceiling dome. Never changing, yet always moving from one end of the cave to the other in some dark way. People with too much time and little funds, squirming and wiggling around to try to survive one more day, worked as hard as they could, toiling under an unheated sun for an uncaring society.

Yet 'tonight,' there was some semblance of weather that Detective Barty Greaseline could experience. A type of weather that was rare in the metal, trashed garbage heap of a city, but a different experience nonetheless that livened up his day a little bit and made him think of the surface and all the joys he could experience there whenever he managed to get out of this little slum-filled hellhole he lived in.

The power was out in the district. Some nibbler more than likely nibbled a bit more than they bargained for and paid the price, shocked to hell in some forgotten sewer. All of the street lamps in a ten-mile radius were out of power, plunging the area of the Undermine into near-total darkness save for the glaring lights of passing motor cars, torches, and flying contraptions zooming out above.

Detective Greaseline stood at the end of the street beneath an unpowered lamp. His deep orange eyes stared at the rundown, ramshackle building from beneath the rim of his wide-brimmed hat. The soft pattering of water fell atop him, drenching the thick overcoat he wore as he huddled beneath its warm comfort.

Rain wasn't a natural occurrence down here in the city. Whenever it did, it meant a pipe above had broken, springing a leak cascading down to the ground below. Some other poor bastard - maybe even the one meant to move the sun - would have to work overtime to fix it and with no hazard pay for the trouble.

That wasn't the Detectives' worry, though. What he did worry about was the poor mook who died tonight. As he lit up a peacebloom cigarette, letting the rank smell of tar and herbs fill up beneath his hat, he reached into his inner pocket to pull out the notes he had hastily written before being called to duty.

A murder out in the vatworks happened recently. Looked suspicious and wanted someone to come in and find some answers. It seemed another soul lost in the endless parade of death that existed down here. No doubt, not the last tonight either, knowing how dangerous the city was even in the best of times. If he had to guess, it was just a burglary gone wrong. Such was the case that happened more than it should have.

As a detective, it was his job to find the answers, whether it was a simple case or not. Nobody—not even the cartels—liked to leave a question about someone's death unanswered. When the bodies stopped moving, someone had to answer, and if it meant a rival had to do the time, all the better to put words to the unsaid.

Realizing he was wasting time and that the longer he stood beneath the lamp would get him covered in more of the goop from above, Greaseline sighed and burnt his cigarette out on his boot heel before he made his way to the apartment. Work called for him, and the longer he waited, the less he'd be paid.

The apartment's interior was the same derelict, ramshackle building as all the rest in the district. Sheets of corrugated steel, nibbler-eaten wood beams, and metal floors made up the entirety of the building, and each apartment was roughly the size of a closet with none of the amenities one would expect in a proper home. No kitchen and a shared bathroom for the four dozen tenants served as the only comfort one could find. A comfort that was a luxury to the homeless but paid for as a premium by those kept off the street.

Up the broken, uneven stairs, Detective Greaseline went, walking by goblins in a hurry to their third shifts that day, and nosy neighbors looking to rubberneck for some gossip. Bruisers clad in their bright blue and green spiky armor kept the peace by force as their spark batons angrily hummed, and the red lenses of their helms stared down any would-be trespassers to the third-floor crime scene.

The smell of grease and trash hung heavily in the air. Fighting his way through the mobs of the interested and disinterested, Detective Greaseline eventually made his way to the front, jostled by the bodies pressing all around him in the small, dark hallway.

One of the bruisers stared him down, swiveling his head as Greaseline made eye contact with the lenses, sensing the narrowed, bored glare from behind the helm.

"Move along, pal. There ain't nothin' for ya' to see here," the goblin guard said, smacking the humming baton in his hand, blue jolts of electricity illuminating his metal-clad jawline.

Greaseline anticipated that response. It wasn't the first time he had gone through this particular thunderdome. With a wave of his hand, he pulled back the lapel of his overcoat, flashing the fake brass badge pinned to his chest, which showed that he was an officer of the Law.

The bruiser lowered his head, briefly stared at the badge, and stepped aside. "Ah yeah, alright. Been waitin' for ya'. Talk to the boss inside."

"Yeah, I know the drill," Greaseline mumbled.

With a nod, he tipped his hat and pushed himself through. His boot steps echoed in the hall beneath the din of murmurs and rumors that swirled around him like a torrent of discontentment. Death often came down here, but no one liked it when it came at another's hand.

He stared at the door in front of him—square, made of rusted metal with a small peephole. Reaching out to the handle, he turned and entered a whole other world, where the smell of blood mingled with garbage and oil.

It was a standard room—small, cramped, and barely more than the size of a prison cell. A cot covered in papers and books sat in the corner of the room, next to a hanging closet filled with clothing, and adjacent to a small square window. A bright, gaudy pink rug was tossed on the floor, covered in food stains, while at the

other side of the room, a desk sat opposite the bed. Once more, books, pens, ink, and paper were stacked like towers all around.

At the desk, slumped over an open book, a bald, middle-aged goblin lay dead with a fist-sized hole blown through his skull. His arms sprawled wide as a mechano-knife whirred, sawing endlessly between his shoulder blades.

It was a gruesome scene, and for a second, Greaseline was taken aback by the savagery of the death. Several bruisers were already waiting for him, having spent their time rifling through the crime scene and picking for valuables. One bruiser without a helmet caught the Detective's gaze and waved for him over.

Detective Greaseline looked at her and nodded, eyeing the older goblin woman as dark bags hung beneath her thin eyes. Her dark purple hair was tangled in a messy bun, and the jagged scrap metal armor laid heavily upon her body. In her hand was a small cloth purse, and when he approached, she tossed it to him.

"Here's yer payment, Detective. Took your time, didn't you? Figure you'd be here the moment the gold glittered," she disdainfully said.

Greaseline caught it, weighing it in his hand as the moolah clinked with each palm shift. "Just doin' my job, Captain. Getting paid is good, but I do like it when justice is served more if you believe me."

"Yeah, yeah. Save the corny speeches for the trade princes', yes-men, Detective. Just make sure you work quickly. We've got a cleanin' crew coming in soon. The Landlord wants the body out to move a new tenant in."

"So soon? Body ain't even cold," Greaseline replied, raising a brow.

The Captain shrugged. "What do ya' want from me? Ain't my job. I jus' do what my bosses say. My boss says to get you in here, get yer clues, get the body outta here, and move on. Lots more trouble in this city, especially with all of

Azeroth stompin' through lately. Had some gnomes turfing with some small-time outfit out by Venturewood."

Greaseline mulled that over as he shook the bag in his hand again and pocketed it. "Guess this city is going to hell in a handbag. Blood been flowing more than gold these days down here in Undermine."

"Always been that way," she replied and stepped aside.

Once more, Greaseline tipped his hat as he walked further into the room, shooing away the nosy bruisers under her orders to step aside as he went to do his job. The payment was heavy in his pocket, and he knew he had to do a good job with this, as they had paid for the premium services on behalf of the victim. Who he was, he'd find out. Why they wanted premium detecting, he'd also find out.

The first clue he found was one of the weapons that took the man's life. As he laid there dead, with wide, shocked eyes staring unseeing at the numbers and figures of the book beneath his broken nose, Greaseline looked at the knife as it continually dug in. The mechanism whirred as the handle uselessly shook up and down.

He thought he needed to get one of those knives. A battery that went all night like that could come in handy. As he looked at the handle and the maker, he saw that he'd need to consider a discounted knife maker instead. His hand reached and wetly pulled the knife from the body, examining the maker's mark at the base of the bloodied blade.

'Toplife Newknives' was the maker. Some fancy weapon dealer by the Intercontinental Hotel that billed itself as the latest in weapon technology from the minds of the Bilgewater's brightest. Carefully, he swung it back and forth as the

bruisers watched him, feeling the heft and weight of the weapon slice cleanly through the air as dried blood splattered the floor.

"Nice weapon," Greaseline said, making idle conversation.

The Captain shrugged. "Spent a month's paycheck on one of those when they first opened their shop. They're alright. Too much pizazz and not useful in a scrap. All looks and too high a price."

Taking that into consideration, Greaseline nodded, and gently put the weapon back where he found it before he whipped out his notebook. He'd need to take a SELFIE picture of it later as evidence, though he wondered why someone would have needed such an expensive weapon to do the job. A sharp piece of scrap iron killed just as easily and messily as any other knife. If the perpetrator thought to leave it behind, why trace it to an exclusive store?

He eyed the knife again, and then back towards the door he came in from. "Has anyone seen anyone suspicious with fancy cutlery walk in? Lots of rubberneckers out there, and I can already hear the old lady gossip and tall tales being spun. Ain't no one seen anyone that didn't look like they belong come in?"

The Captain shook her head. "Nope. The door was locked when we got here. In fact, the Landlord had to unlock it and let us in because the guy here was late on his weekly rent."

The door locked from the inside meant that the perpetrator couldn't have come in from the front. There were too many eyewitnesses to see them if they didn't belong there, so it made some sense, even if the apartment had a high turnover rate. Hearing that, Detective Greaseline slowly stepped away from the body towards the window and lifted it.

It was unlocked, and fresh, smelly air blew in, ruffling several loosened sheafs of paper. A long, wide pipe ran outside the window, connecting to another apartment building across the street, and up to the road in the distance that led up to hovel hill. Wide and sturdy enough for someone to walk upon.

He wrote that down in his list of notes and closed the window again before turning to the Captain. "All this paper in here. Was he an engineer? Don't see any tools or anything. Just a lot of books and pens."

"Nah. Worse. He was an accountant," she spat, her face contorting to a pinched grimace.

"Not a fan of number crunchers?"

"Husbands an accountant," was all she replied.

"Fair enough," Greaseline said with a shrug. His booted feet crunched atop the loosened paper as he made his way back to the victim, eyeing the bullet hole in the back of his head before he carefully pushed the body aside to look at the book beneath him. It was covered in dried blood, crusting and cracking as it stuck to the paper. Facts, figures, math, and more covered the remaining pages.

"So what's his name?"

"The victim or my husband?" The Captain replied, unamused.

Greaseline pointed at the body and reached for a receipt that was under the victim's nose. It was a pay stub for several drinks at a bar in the blackwater marina area and another from a Pandaren noodle shop in the grodiest part of the vatworks.

The Captain huffed and pulled out her own series of notes from beneath the jagged plates that ran along her bicep. "Apartment Three Eight Tenant Blastus Penpaper. Age thirty-five."

"Blastus Penpaper huh?" Greaseline mused as he placed the pay tabs in his notebook. "Odd name for a goblin. But then again, what do I know? I didn't even name my children."

A sudden knock at the door broke through the solemnity of the room, and Greaseline tensed as his hand quickly swept beneath his coat towards the leather at his belt. The Captain turned, narrowing her sharp eyes to the door before she motioned for one of her grunts to open it for her. No sooner had it opened than three men in white cleaning outfits showed up, each equipped with mops, brooms, and bags.

"Woah, hold on now. This is a crime scene," Greaseline interrupted, waving them off. "We're not done here, you know."

"Look mack, we were told to get in here and clean it all out, alright? I don't make the rules or anything. Just paid to do a job," one of the men replied in annoyance. "Take it up with my boss. Unless the bruisers are stopping us, we're gettin' to work. We work on commission, not hourly."

Greaseline looked at the Captain, expecting help, and met her shaking head before he realized that his time at the crime scene was at an end. With no other option, he growled and ran his hand down his face. "Fine, fine. Just forward all the books and papers to my office so I can go over them later."

"What do I look like? A moving company?" The cleaner replied in a huff.

Knowing what he meant, Greaseline frowned, reached into the inner pocket of his jacket, and fished out several gold coins. Flicking them to each of the cleaning crew in front of him. "What about now?"

"Hey, whatta ya know, got a new side gig. Fine. Dunno where you live, so go to the crematorium later. They're gonna auction off the personal belongings or

burn them alongside the body if it ain't valuable. Got yourself a day tops to do it," the man replied, pocketing the money.

Satisfied with that answer, Greaseline turned back to the body, taking one last look at Blastus's corpse before he reached down and dragged the bloodied book from beneath his face. There was also a small SELFIE picture of him knocked onto the floor, which he took from the frame and pocketed, figuring it would come in handy when identifying him to suspects later in the investigation.

Closing the book and the empty frame with a crisp thud, he replied to the cleaner. "Fine. Make sure they're all bagged," and then turned to the bruiser captain with a tip of his hat. "And to you, Captain, tell your husband I said hello."

The Captain sneered at him, baring her pointed teeth, but didn't reply as she let him out. The crowd outside the apartment room had dispersed, no doubt bored by the fact that there wasn't more to be seen. Even the bruisers guarding the hallway were gone, no doubt somewhere close by to claim they were working but shirking what little duties they had.

It didn't matter to Greaseline. He had several leads to follow up on. Shouldering the book beneath his arm and heavier with his payment, he lightly stepped down the stairs and out of the apartment building as the falling goop from the busted pipe above continued to rain down upon the darkened neighborhood.

Busy cars zoomed by atop the roads. Their flaming exhausts left behind a trail of smoke and acrid air while their ill-fitting lights cut through the dense darkness. Several times, Greaseline was almost hit as he made his way toward a safer part of the neighborhood, cursing at the gall of the drivers for not watching where they were going.

The sounds of fighting in the distance told him that even this distance from the destitution and poverty of the apartments wasn't safe. His hand itched to stay close to the holster beneath his coat. The patter of the rain falling atop him was cold, with the ichor cutting through him like a shiv. He knew that he was in for a long evening of work.

Ignoring the battling thugs fighting for god knows what reason, he reviewed his notes, holding them close beneath the wide brim of his hat to keep them from getting wet.

First, he had the knife store to visit. With a well-made and expensive weapon like that, the client list would be short, especially if it was a custom order. With the twin pay stubs, he had two places to go to retrace the final day of Blastus's life: A speakeasy bar, and a noodle shop with cheap food. Both were on opposite ends of the city but were somehow connected. There was also a visit to the crematorium later, provided they didn't burn the body first thing. He had a doctor friend he knew he could turn to for help examining the body. It couldn't hurt to have more information, no matter how small.

Then he looked at the book he had taken from beneath the lifeless corpse. Flipping to the first page, he saw that it was the personal accounting book that Blastus kept for a man with the initials "J.B.W."

No other name was on it. Just the initials. Whoever this J.B.W. was probably had some answers for what Blastus Penpaper was working on, and why he was targeted for murder. Something in Greaseline's gut told him that this wasn't just a robbery gone wrong. Too many factors were at play for a simple burglary, as it didn't seem like he had anything worth taking. Accountants weren't exactly rich; they just made other people rich, even if their services were in high demand.

With a clap of the book covers, Greaseline figured the best place to go was the bar. A man like that probably went places to drown his sorrows and lessen his worries. Alcohol tended to loosen lips as well, and if he was a regular, the Bartender working there might recognize the victim's name.

Stepping towards the road and gaining his bearings, Greaseline moved to walk to the distant lights of both the Intercontinental Hotel and Gallagio before rough voices behind him called out to him.

"Where do you think you're going?" the voice said.

Instantly, Greaseline turned and saw four figures emerging from an alleyway, clad in black leather armor and wearing bags over their faces, obscuring their identities. They were short, with their large goblin ears peeking through the cut holes in the side of the bags, save for one that Greaseline surmised was a hobgoblin. The large brute smacked a cudgel loudly and threateningly against his shoulder.

"Beat it. I ain't got nothing worth stealing," Greaseline growled, stepping backward towards the road as another street rocket nearly flattened him, the horn angrily blaring into the night.

"It ain't what you got. It's what you know," the voice - masculine but light and airy - said, pulling a knife from his belt—a simple shiv made of dark metal. "We were told that you ain't s'pose to be on this case, Detective. Told to make sure you get the message a few stabs at a time till the lesson stuck."

Instantly, Greaseline whipped back his coat, splashing the raining pipe goop off of him onto the ground as he pulled out his truesilver hand cannon from his holster. Long, thick, and dwarven-made. A piece of technology that was far more reliable than any of the goblin-made guns he had found down here in Undermine.

The smooth bore barrel pointed at the first thug, shifting between them all as his narrowed eyes stared down the sight.

"Well, one or two of you might get me. The question is, who wants to take the chance and see which one it'll be? Something tells me none of you are big gamblers."

The large hobgoblin dropped his club with a loud clunk and backed off with raised, defensive hands. His corpulent form disappeared into the shadows as he left his three companions—heavy footfalls splashing in the dark alley.

"Well, now maybe one of you might get me," Greaseline said, clicking back the hammer.

The first goblin thug cursed and held up his arm to signal to the brave few left. "Aight, detective. You win this go around. Just know that this was a warning to you the first time. The next time we come, it ain't gonna be a warning, so you better keep your eyes open. We're gonna be watching you."

Then, the last three skulked back into the shadows, leaving Greaseline alone again. The street lamps turned on as if providence came, and the busted pipe above stopped raining down over the area. With the light came a renewed vision of the world around him, though Greaseline couldn't see any of the thugs who almost assaulted him. No one walked around. Not even the homeless and destitute. Only the insane motorists who occasionally drove by.

Holstering his gun, Detective Greaseline now knew this case would not be the typical murder case he worked on. Something deeper lurked in the shadows of Undermine, and he didn't know how deep it ran. Earlier, he debated whether it was a simple murder gone wrong, and now he had his answer.

Someone targeted Blastus Penpaper, and Detective Barty Greaseline would figure it out.

Flipping his collar up to protect against a nonexistent wind, he reached into his pocket again, fumbling past the bag of gold to the carton of cigarettes he kept on hand. He knew he had to stop smoking these things (his ex-wife often told him to stop), but he needed one now to cool his nerves as the adrenaline left him like ice running down his back to puddle on the trash-compacted ground beneath his feet.

Lighting the end with a match, he watched the ghosts of smoke wistfully swish and disappear into the ether before him. The calming scent and taste of heavy chemicals and peacebloomed filled his lungs. The bright cherry red tip of the burning stick was a guiding light in the chaotic city.

He followed it to his next destination. What trouble it took him to, he'd have to see for himself.

## END OF PART I



**Author Note:** *This is Part 1 of a 6-part Serialized Story. The following parts will come out in the following five Issues of the World of Warcraft Fanzine, but you can access them early via a download by signing up for my Newsletter!*

*If you want the full story now, go to <https://reasegaming.substack.com/> and sign up. You'll receive an email with a link to download it. See you there!*

# TO KISS THE SUN

Written by Harutho Oxenhead



**The great sun beat down, hot and heavy, on Mizwe's shoulders.** The very direct delineation of the Earthmother's bounties in Mulgore ended where the red rocks of the Stonetalon Mountains began. His hooves felt the earth under them gently and tenderly. His whole life had been spent on those plains, yet here he was - alone.

*North.*

He took a tentative hoof step over the line where the verdant grasses of Mulgore ended. The scars of the Grimtotem's exile were still evident climbing the bluff - remains of a scorched wagon, the bones of the kodo that was pulling it bleached by the sun, discarded weapons rusting and crumbling after all this time. Here on the bluff, though, it was different.

*North.*

He finished the step with the air seeming to push him towards the summit of Stonetalon itself. With both hooves on the rocky terrain, he somehow felt more sure and less sure of his quest at the same time. He was in training to be a Brave and protect the home he clung so closely to, and this was his last trial.

*North.*

*Well, the only thing to do now is to climb down the other side of the mesa,* he thought to himself. Pushing to the other side, there was no evident pathway down the cliff face. He looked to the left - the cliff felt more straight and foreboding. He looked to the right - a small goat trail seemed to wind its way down. Not the best, but what he had. Guess it was a good thing the kodo didn't make it.

Mizwe made his way down the mountainside and into the ravine below. Most of the day had been spent coming to the threshold of Mulgore, and so night was coming on. An'she's last rays were dipping below the smaller mountains that led out to the Barrens, and Mu'sha hung proud in the sky. At least she was more full tonight than most. Finding a place to bed down could possibly wait a while - there would be enough moonlight.

Rustling came from one side of the ravine. He looked over, seeing a small light flitting behind a rock. The glow of a campfire shone up the mountain a little ways - a cave! This was perfect. He needed to do this on his own, but welcoming travelers was always a good sign. Elated, he wound his way up the cliff side and towards the cave and the campfire with friends waiting to share.

A small whistle was all the warning he got.

THWACK!

"OW!"

Mizwe reached up to where there was now a sharp pain on the back of his head. The rock rolled, unbothered, at his hooves. He felt a warmth pooling in his fingers. "Wha-?"

Another whistle and this time he knew to duck as the rock flew overhead.

“You no take candle!” The small voice screamed from within some bushes, the light just poking out. Mizwe didn’t need to be told twice. The ‘campfire’ was not going to be welcoming if this was the first sight he got near it. Kobolds notoriously work in groups, and where there’s one, there are fifty.

He dodged another rock from the unseen assailant as he ran his way down to the bottom of the ravine. He kept running until his hooves hurt and he was thoroughly winded. He saw a boulder and slid behind it, trying to calm his breathing and listen for the kobold or its rocks. Nothing.

“Maybe a camp would be best.” Mizwe found himself off to the side of the road, a ways into the tree line. Nothing but the boulder and the conifers offered any semblance of shelter in this moment and neither would make the best shelter for the night. He paused to think.

“Okay, so if those were kobolds, then this must’ve been Boulderslide Ravine...” He tapped his head as he thought aloud, eventually drawing a crude map in the sandy soil. “Ugh! This isn’t a good spot to spend the night anyway you look at it!”

*North.*

He stopped thinking for a moment. In the rush of the altercation with the kobold, he had all but forgotten why he was here alone in the first place. The wind was quieter down here in the valley, but it was unmistakable. He was young, he could push through the night at least once.

Mizwe worked to make sure he traveled smarter now. He kept to the darker areas of what was left of the forest, trying to make sure to avoid anything until he knew exactly what was there. Shuffling in the forest floor could be anything from a Gritotem raiding party to a giant spider. He shuddered at the thought.

The night was long, but the cool breeze billowing through the canyon-like valleys of the Stonetalon Mountains made it pleasant enough. As An'she's rays broke over Stonetalon itself, Mizwe uttered a prayer of gratitude. "At least by your light, I'll be able to see the dangers ahead."

The skirmishes between the Horde and Alliance in Stonetalon were still raging in these lands, especially Windshear Crag. He didn't want to run afoul of one of the Alliance raiding parties, or worse, an ambush, so he tried to keep to Webwinder path as much as possible. He'd rather fight the odd spider than have to deal with an Alliance patrol.

The day went on and he continued his way north, a feeling within himself urging him onward. In the heat of the day, Mizwe stopped for a break in the shade of a large conifer. The water, no longer as cool as he would have wished, still quenched his thirst thankfully. There was a little more spice bread, kodo jerky, and pine nuts left for his rations, so he decided to eat the bread and leave the longer lasting rations for later. As a cool breeze blew down from the tops of the peaks around him and sitting in the shade with a belly somewhat full of food, he felt the weight of his choices on him. He was tired. A nap would probably do him some good since the heat of the day was only going to get worse for the next while. He embraced the darkness and let himself rest for a while - he could move through the night again if he needed to.

Next thing Mizwe knew was pain. Intense pain in his shoulder.

He jumped up and spun around, his head still a little dizzy from both the pain and fuzzy from the nap. A cooler breeze pooled around him and as he tried to adjust to being awake, his eyes struggled to focus. In the twilight of dusk, he found the source of the pain - a large webwinder spider. The dark green of the

spider was hard to pick out against the greens of the valley in the fading light. His head pounding with intense pain didn't help, either.

The large spider, as big as most wolves in Mulgore, lunged at Mizwe, who barely was able to get his hooves to move in time. The movement was more than his legs could take and he tumbled into a not-so-graceful roll towards his things. He righted himself and grabbed his pack, the spider retreating and waiting to see if its prey would weaken instead of having to fight for its meal. Mizwe retreated up the path, not taking his eyes off of the beast who now viewed him as food.

As he walked backwards up the path, the spider followed from just within the treeline. Mizwe's head throbbed and he winced in pain. The spider moved in a little, hoping that the venom was doing its work, but Mizwe grunted and threw a stone at the assailant. The spider easily dodged the weak throw, and retreated a bit. Mizwe grunted in aggravation, trying to look behind him, but the darkness showed nothing as his head throbbed again and he stumbled.

Another advance from the spider and another rock from Mizwe. Both were futile. The spider sat back, deciding to just let the venom do its work fully. Mizwe noted the patience and tried to make a run for it, but his legs felt like jello, and the skittering in the fallen needles proved that the spider was keeping up just fine. He needed to think fast, but thinking was hard in this groggy state. "I shouldn't have fallen asleep," he lamented.

A stone jutting from the path went unseen through the pain and Mizwe went sprawling again on the dirt. The spider didn't lunge this time, it waited. Mizwe threw another rock in frustration anyways, landing feet short of its target. The spider didn't react at all.

Mizwe slumped on the ground, just to get his bearings. He took a few breaths and let his body rest, as he knew the activity was only making the

injection of venom worse. “Calm your mind, steel your body,” was what his instructors would say. The rest was good, his mind was seeming to clear and the pain seemed to thin out, spreading around his head and chest, but becoming more dull as it did so. Then he heard the skittering start up again.

He opened his eyes to see the spider almost on top of him. Mandibles clattering, the spider saw this as the time to move in for the kill. Mizwe jumped into action, his mind not his own. He reached out and grabbed the sharp chelicerae before they could inject more venom. The front legs of the spider reached around Mizwe and pulled him in.

“RRRAAAAGGGGHHH!” Mizwe roared as he pulled with all his might. The spider chittered, its endites flexing as Mizwe pulled off the venom filled fangs, liquids spraying all over his front. He quickly spat and shut his mouth as the spider skittered back into the treeline. Mizwe stumbled after it for a bit, but the injured animal was able to climb into the trees and away.

*North.*

Mizwe made his way further up the path, stumbling in the dimming light. An’she had passed the mountaintops and the darkness grew around him. He stumbled his way for a little while, just wanting to get past Webwider Vale and away from the spiders.

“That was stupid,” Mizwe chided himself as he stumbled along. “I should have known better than to have stopped and rested there.” His breathing had become ragged, making the trek up into the mountains harder. His vision blurred from time to time as he resisted the urge to scratch the bites in his shoulder. Twice he had to stop and retch up what little trail food he had eaten.

Before Mu'sha had made even a quarter of her nightly trek, Mizwe had collapsed. No longer on the trail, he had gotten turned around in his flight out of the vale. Just needing to be free of the spiders, he found a small outcropping and was able to lay down. Stomach churning, head swimming, and his whole body now feeling numb and hot, he crawled up, hoping to hide from the world until this venom passed through his system.

For the next while the days and nights passed without Mizwe noting much. At the times where he was awake, he was suffering from fevers and chills, muscle spasms, headaches, difficulty breathing, sweats. The pain would make him pass out at times only to wake and still have the pain. Thankfully, a small rainshower came in the night sometime and he was able to collect some fresh water.

When An'she rose in the east to herald in a new day, which day he knew not, Mizwe was finally able to stand. Waking to the rays of the sun, he found that some of his strength had returned, without the spasms or other conditions. He sat and meditated for a bit - today was a day to take things slow and feel out how his body was doing. "Could go back and collect what I may have left on the ground, but that would be somewhat futile at this point," he said, trying to keep his defeat at this delay out of his mind.

He stood and surveyed his surroundings. Standing on the edge of a grove of trees - thinner, new growth. A small pool could be seen down a bit and dark smoke billowed beyond it. "Too dark for a campfire," Mizwe mused. "That must be the goblin encampment that's harvesting this part of the mountains." He shook his head in disgust. He didn't know many goblins, but those he did, he didn't particularly like. Every one he had met seemed to be more out for themselves and what they could take than helping others. "Best to steer clear."

He made his way around Mirkfallon Lake, making sure to try and keep to the forested areas so he could have some cover. The pridewings that inhabited this area should be migrating to the Needles this time of the year, so the small patch of forest around the lake should be safe.

“The trees will be cool and help my body recover more. May also find some food and other materials,” he mused aloud to no one. With his small pack of supplies gone, he needed some new supplies, and food. First thing was first, though, and he made his way to the small lake.

Not much could be found here. Most of the goblins moved on when Garrosh’s war machine vacated the valley, but there were enough supplies that he could move on. Upwards is where he wanted to go. Trees grew fuller up the mountain, he knew it. Most of the elves left from what he heard, but he knew that up the mountain there would be more trees and it was where he needed to go.

Over the next few days, Mizwe worked his way up the mountain. Following the well-worn hoofpaths was the best bet, but he still found it a lonely road. Cliffwalker Post rose to the west of the pathway, silent and lonely. The remains of the village sat deserted and half-burned, their husks long forgotten. He took a moment and pondered. He wanted to pay respects, but it felt unfitting to do so from down here in the valley. The lifts didn’t work, as no one lived there now, but there had to be another way up.

He wandered around the mesa for a while, looking for any path up, but none could be found. He took a moment in the late afternoon breeze to sit and think. He was torn now. North, up, peak. He still felt pulled to continue, but something in him told him to stay for a moment and pay respects. Cliffwalkers weren’t his clan, but he was tied to them through his father. And as there were no

direct descendants thanks to the orcs stationed there all those years ago, he felt he needed to.

As he sat pondering, a ram passed by. He watched as the ram jumped onto a ledge on the cliff and began to pick its way up the mesa. He watched for a while, so as to not spook the beast, but it paused in its ascent, looking back at him, as if challenging him to make the climb. He stalked his way to the base of the cliff and paused to watch the ram, which continued on.

Mizwe jumped, grabbing hold of the first place where he saw the ram's hooves find purchase. From there he swung to match the ram's movements, trying to keep pace with the animal as it zig-zagged up the side of the mesa. A couple of times, he faltered or the rock gave way, and Mizwe worked to find a better purchase. Each time the ram continued on, confident in its hooves to do the work.

The ram crested the mesa, hopping up to the plateau well ahead of Mizwe. Mizwe, finding this the hardest part and his arms and calves screaming at him for respite, pressed on. He found his last few handholds and crested the mesa just a few moments after the ram. He collapsed on the ground, happy to have made it. He took a few breaths before sitting up. Looking around, no one and nothing were to be seen. The post was as desolate as he thought. Long abandoned after the orcs ransacked it for "defiance to the Horde," only shells of the structures remained. It appeared that even animals had long since deserted it. Not even the ram was seen.

Mizwe looked around, even running over to the opposite edge, but his guide up the cliff was gone. No hair nor horn was seen on the plateau, over the edge, or in the woods below. He righted himself and went to survey the husk of a home that once was Cliffwalker Post.

The inn was by far the largest of the remains. A safe haven for all who pilgrimed up the slopes of Stonetalon, it had been a place of refuge and communion. The community here welcomed all in the name of An'she, Mu'sha, and the Earthmother. Most homes had been completely erased, leaving the mesa's top just bare dirt and a few scrub brushes. A post here and a post there were able to give tale of the sturdier homes - that of the chieftain, the elder shaman, etc. The central totem was fallen and the paint was all worn off. Most of the features were even worn by the dust on the wind.

Mizwe made his way to the inn and poked around a bit. Dust, dirt, and bones hid in the corners of the building where the wind trapped things by the beams. A flick of something rose-colored caught Mizwe's eye in the late afternoon glow. He walked over and brushed off the majority of the dirt to find a pouch, embroidered with an eagle, a sun, and a mountain, with some herbs inside. A ritual bag, faded with time. Either some poor traveler like him, on a spiritual journey, or some elder in the tribe who was slain. He tenderly took the pouch and muttered a prayer of thanks to the ancestors.

Moving back out into the main part of the mesa, Mizwe sat, cross legged, in front of where the fire pit would have been. Placing the pouch in front of him, he pulled out some small sticks he had collected for his evening fire. Starting the fire was easy enough, but the winds worked to blow it out. He stopped his efforts long enough to build a wind wall from the earth. He didn't need the fire to last long, just long enough.

With the fire started, Mizwe threw the herbs from the small pouch onto it. After a moment, the aroma hit him and he breathed it in deeply. Another breath

and he felt himself slipping from this world. A third breath, and all that remained was his legs on the mesa. A fourth and he was free from his body and this world.

Lifted from the mesa, Mizwe could see the peak of Stonetalon. Bare and without forest, the peak was imposing. Alone, a glowing figure stood, fighting back waves of darkness that poured from within the mountain. Figures ebbed and flowed from the darkness, all pushing on the bright figure who stood against the unending flow. As the lone figure fought, great drops of pure light dripped from around them to the peak.

“ENOUGH!” the figure cried, a halo of radiant energy pulsing around him, driving the darkness back within the mountain. A moment of respite was had as they collapsed to the peak.

Blood pooled around the figure of bright light, sending out radiant energy all around. Time passed before Mizwe’s eyes, and soon a forest grew, tended to by the kaldorei. Trees imbued with the power of the sun, unknown to the elves within the wood’s canopy.

Soon, the dark energies returned, corrupting the kaldorei and driving them from their home. The trees dimmed in the darkness, but the light never fully receded from within.

*North.*

Mizwe came to, lying on his back as the last rays of An’she disappeared behind the western peaks. Mu’sha, in her soft light, cast the shadows long and deep across the mesa top.

“No sense in trying to descend in the dark.”

Mizwe took shelter in the remains of the inn for the night. Temperatures dropped drastically, exposed on the bluff, but the fire pit still worked for keeping a small fire going most of the night. Morning came and Mizwe descended, sliding a lot more than climbing his way down the cliff face.

Something about the vision renewed Mizwe's movements that day. More direct and focused, he wound his way through the woods to the peak. Something was here. Something he needed in his journey through life.

The darkened forests of the peak of Stonetalon lied. The shadows crept ever darker around the vacant kaldorei homes. The silence of the barrow den was interrupted with whispers on the wind as it whistled through the empty corridors. Life had left these woods. Light had left these woods. Something about the peak, where An'she gave his blood, had been twisted and tormented and the trees no longer held the spark of the Sun.

He didn't know what he was looking for, but he knew he'd know it when he knew it. He weaved through the trees, trying to be as silent as his heavy footfalls would allow him to be, pausing whenever he heard the echo of his own hooves reverberating through the woods or the crack of a stick broken under his weight. As he wasn't a naturally stealthy bull, it was a lot.

The light abandons you here.

The thought pierced his mind so forcefully he stopped and whirled around, his arms flailing. All he was met with was silence and a raven, standing on a branch behind him.

"CAW!" it screeched before fluttering away, deeper into the woods. He followed the bird with his eyes, noting how it dodged between shafts of light that pierced the canopy, if only barely.

Come. I am here.

He followed the bird, sticking to the shadows to keep hidden from danger.

Trust me.

He pushed deeper into the woods. Most pools of light disappeared from the forest floor, the breeze flitting through the large trunks of the old growth forest. Darkness pressed on him.

**What are you looking for, young one of the Earthmother?** a voice taunted from nowhere. Looking around, Mizwe saw nothing except for the raven, again perched on a branch just above his reach. **Power, glory, honor? You can have those. Many are the gifts that can be yours, if you but ask.**

Mizwe thought and pondered for a moment. No, it wasn't here. What his quest was pushing him towards was deeper still. He looked towards the elven ruins deeper in the forest. He was almost there, and it was there he would find - well, something. He was sure of it. He paid the new voice no concern and pushed on, deeper and darker still.

Mizwe's mind was racing. Every shadow that flitted about seemed to him some creature, about ready to pounce. The feeling of being hunted warped the very world around him, though nothing was there. No, not nothing. The raven still followed.

**You won't find it here. It's already gone. The sun cannot reach you here,** the voice again taunted.

No. The sun was here. He knew it. And so he pressed on. Making it to the elven ruins, he paused at the center. The canopy overgrew even this clearing, blotting out most of the light. Most, but not all. No shaft of light welcomed him, but as he paused and felt the world around him, trying to blot out what his mind

made up, he could feel him. The sun's warmth still hit his skin, dulled by the leafy canopy, but it was there. So he pressed on.

No longer pulled north, he walked between the deepest shadows, now wanting to keep to the lighter parts. Something in the light gave him comfort, security. Keeping from the shadows also meant that if something *was* stalking him in the shadows, he'd be able to see them before they got in a strike.

The buildings loomed around him, broken husks of an era of watchers and guides for nature. Something was here, and these sentinels still stood, trying to watch over the land, but a reminder of the failure of their duty. Each day, they sat and looked over their failure, noting what they cannot change. Mizwe paused in the shadow of the largest building, musing over the history that it must know.

"AAGH!" A pain rocked through Mizwe's left tendon, causing him to kneel as the leg gave out. He backed away from the shadow of the building and back to a lighter patch in the ground, trying to see what had lashed out at him. Nothing could be seen. Plants swayed in the breeze and shadows danced, deepening and deepening around him.

Again, Mizwe backed away from the darker parts of the forest. He turned from the shadow and started to get up, favoring his right leg and hobbling how he could. He was close, he could feel it. Something was here that An'she wanted him to find, and he would find it.

"UGH!" Something larger slammed him from behind, it felt like a large branch or a club from his training days slamming into his back, toppling him forward into the dirt. This time, trying to be quicker, he saw a large vine retreating back into the darkness, the large, bulbous end giving the shadow within a shadow away. There was something in this forest, that was for sure. He had heard druids

talk of the night elves abandoning the peak as darkness closed in, but he never heard what it was.

Again, he scrambled up and hobbled in a direction, any direction, away from the vine creature that was assailing him. Disoriented and dazed, he hobbled into the forest, seeking what An'she saw here for him. He knew it was here, he could feel it.

Another impact, this time to the right, slammed his face, as something from the left slashed into his arm. He tried, failing, to grab the tendril that hit his face, but turned in time to see that the slice this time was not from some lashing vine, as he thought, but from some elven looking figure with a glaive. She had hit him and quickly retreated back to a tree branch, out of reach. The elf, with no discernable eye-glint to give them away, sat, crouched on the branch and blending into the twisting shadows.

He snarled at the elven figure, but tried to still his mind. Many things were here, it seemed, and he needed to focus on staying alive. He backed away, keeping his eyes on the elven assailant, this time honing his ears to the noises of the woods. A creak gave away the next attack - left. He reached out and grabbed the lasher vine that came for him, giving a yank. With a horrid squelching sound, the vine gave way as it tore somewhere in the darkness. He lobbed it at the elven woman in the tree, just to see the figure jump to another branch and avoid the large tendril of dark plant matter.

He made his way backwards, not taking his eyes off the dangerous threat that had swiped his arm and was sticking to the darkest shadows. The paler skin was odd to Mizwe, but he had to focus on other things in the dark.

Again, another lash, this time it was two. One came from in front of him - the large, club-like vine - and to his left was one of the thin slashing ones. The elf

took this time to jump from her perch and take another swing. Mizwe chose to try and block the elf with the club in front of him, being able to deflect the majority of the elf's attack, but still taking a small gash to the cheek. The lasher from the left was too quick and wrapped around his arm. Tiny lacerations were made along the wrist as it unwound, his hand losing some grip strength in the process and allowing the vine to retreat to safety.

**Do you still need power? You could join instead of becoming a victim,** the voice cooed from the shadows.

"No!" Mizwe screamed. It was meant to stay in his head, but something within him also needed to hear him say it. He scrambled back, falling to the earth behind him and scooted back on the forest floor. The elf, like a panther, circled around Mizwe, waiting to see the wounded bull's weaknesses, and then exploit them for the kill.

Mizwe reached around with his hands, searching for something and knowing not if it would be there.

I'm here.

Reassured, Mizwe's hands fell on something large and rough. He turned for a second to see a fallen tree, felled by some blade, sitting on the ground under his hand. There was a radiance within that still shone, but faintly.

While Mizwe was distracted by the log, the elf leaped, roaring in rage. Mizwe turned to face her and brought up the log.

"HRUGH!" they both yelled as the log and the blade collided. The log shone with a radiance like that of An'she at noon-day. Mizwe shielded his eyes, and the elf slunk back. In the light, Mizwe could see that this elf was no elf, but just a shell of a person. The body was paler than any elf he had met before, the eyes were

sunken and hollow. Whatever darkness had permeated this place had crept into this elf and taken control.

The log, now radiating solar heat and light, seared Mizwe for a moment, but he soon acclimated to it. Whatever light was coming from within the log, it was meant to burn his foes, and not him. His wounds, previously a distraction, were now growing to a dull pain, and a memory. He looked to see the light mending his wounds as he stood his ground against the assailant.

Vines lashed out from all around him, the forest fighting back against the light. Mizwe brought the log high into the air, then brought it down in front of him, sending a radiant energy out all round him. The glow of this large weapon now surrounded him, sending waves of energy out to burn away the vines, consecrating the ground for a moment where he stood.

“A warrior can’t stand alone.” Mizwe thought of his mentor’s words in training. He knew of their truth, and though An’she was with him, and this fallen tree empowered him, he knew he couldn’t stay and win the fight. He would need to come back with allies to cleanse this corruption of the peak.

Mizwe growled once more at the sentinel who stood at bay by the light and then retreated back down the mountain, bounding through the forest as though leaving a bad dream. One day, the light would come back to Stonetalon Peak, and Mizwe planned to be there when it happened.

**THE END**

To Kiss The Sun  
Drawn by Palehorn Tea



# THE SPEAKEASY LIFE

Written by Assiar

Edited by Rease Stoneheart



**D.J Slumm only gave Assiar a few minutes to get ready.**

Outside the stage, the crowd was bringing down the house, and not in the way the venue owners would have wanted. Instead of cheering and spending their hard-earned coins on monetary needs, they practically ripped up the floorboards, waiting for the show to begin. Tickets for this performance went for a high price before the scalpers got to them, and many people in the crowd wanted their chance to see the Diva who had headlined so many venues over the years.

Assiar peered from behind the satin curtain, careful not to get her curved horns caught on the fabric as she spied the waiting crowd. A smirk curled on her lips, and she knew that she already had them eating out of the palm of her hand. Hell, she hadn't even gone onto the stage yet, and they were chomping at the bit for just a peek at her!

Slumm tutted and pointed to his watch, and Assi knew that her time staring and anticipating was over. If she delayed, she knew the crowd would likely get violent. The owner of the speakeasy - a slimy little man named Garfunkel Gritz - would have had it coming, given how the stage squeaked and flexed under her weight (not to mention the other cut corners). Yet, she was a professional for a

reason, and professionals held themselves to a higher standard if they wanted to succeed in this business.

At the mark, the lights in the venue dimmed with a hot hiss of the electricity being killed, and Slumm started to play the music. He slammed his hands against his piano while the other goblins in his group banged their guitars and drums, and suddenly the energy in the place changed. The electricity might have been killed, but the air was electrified with anticipation as the brawling and battling in the seats settled, and all eyes went to the stage. Even the thugs and bruisers paid to keep the place orderly-or as orderly as a goblin dive bar could be-were sent on their behinds.

With a loud, prominent stomp of her hoof upon the wooden floor, Assi exposed one long, muscular thigh from behind the curtain amid a chorus of whistles and cheers.

Then the raggedy, thin curtain rose, exposing Assiar fully as she pulled off her long overcoat to reveal a seductive outfit beneath that hugged across her ample curves and bust, made purely to draw attention to her best physical assets. Another chorus of whistles and cheers erupted as she raised her hands to entangle her fingers in her wild, curly mane. In unison, the crowd gasped, and Assi knew she had them eating out of the palm of her hand.

The Guitar player of the band grinned (despite having lost three teeth in an earlier brawl from an earlier set) and tossed Assiar a microphone, who caught it with ease as she twirled on the spot, and struck another pose, dancing to the very front of the stage, staring out at the ever widening eyes of the sea of goblin patrons.

"Get ready, boys and girls, I'm about ready to blow your mind tonight," she giggled, winked, and blew a kiss to no one in particular. Several men in the front row suddenly started to fight over who she was aiming at.

She was very glad that she wore the tight lacy stuff today for this. A slow, wicked grin pulled at her plush lips as she sauntered to the center of the stage with the crowd now watching what she'd do next.

She sang. A jovial, flirtatious song about how good she'd be as a lover to her man. How she'd 'take care of him' in the best of ways. Her voice rising in a purring warble as she enhanced her song with her movements, as they accentuated her body the most. A melody full of double entendres but evocative of a rough, burning romance.

Each end of each section of the song was met with a heavy hoof stepping upon the floor, and by the time she covered the stage to the band, she was ready for her second song. Another bawdy song, but slower and sweeter in the poison she sang. One that spoke of heartache, looking for another heartache, all in the vain hopes of finding the one good man in a sea.

She splayed across the top of DJ Slumm's piano, bringing one gloved hand to her chest to caress across her body while her white curly hair spilled over the side of the piano like a waterfall. The crowd surged forward, having left their seats long ago to lean against the front of the stage as much as the bouncers and thugs would let them. Amidst the crooning music, a few goblins lucked out and were pummeled into unconsciousness for the remainder of the act.

It didn't bother Assiar in the least. She knew that it would only enhance the legends of her shows. At the end of her song, she winked to no one in particular, sat up, and sauntered across the stage with long strides, letting her tail whip

behind her in a frenzy while the jewels and gold clicked and clinked between her words.

Another song, and then another one after that. The heat of the lights above drenched her in sweat, but on and on, the Diva sang and moved until the time she was bought for was eventually paid. She bowed to the audience as deeply as she could (giving them an eyeful for a mindful later) and turned to make her way off stage as a raucous round of applause echoed behind her.

Though no sooner had she stepped off the stage than it collapsed under its weight and the beat of her dance moves. Wood splintered and shattered, caving in on itself among a plume of dust and splinters. Her night wasn't over as she went deeper behind the stage into the darker parts closest to the dressing room.

Garfinkle Gritz waited for her outside her room. He was short and squat, with a bald head, three chins, and several gold teeth to match his gold jewelry. His leering grin was dirty, and his narrowed, weasely eyes stared up at Assiar, causing her to squirm inwardly slightly, even though she showed no outward discomfort.

"Great performance, toots, great. Absolutely amazing," he said, bringing up a full tip jar and shaking it till several coins fell out. "Hell, we made so much moolah today I can probably get a whole new stage built! Say, you ain't headin back to Stormwind any time are ya?"

"Oh, sweetheart, only if the money is good," Assi purred, and bent down slightly with an equally sneering smirk painted on her lips. "A girl's gotta eat, and the Intercontinental asks for a premium to stay in luxury. Got to go where the money is, and you did pay for only one night."

Garfunkel eyed her up, both with that leer and suspicion, narrowing his eyes. "What, ya won't let a guy like me treat ya and wine and dine ya and convince ya for another night's performance?"

"I might have other plans. I might not. Depends on how much of the tip jar you're willing to share."

He looked at her again, then at the jar, and begrudgingly gave it up with a groan. Though he kept about a fifth of it, skimming it off the top to pocket. "Yer lucky I needs ya' yah know? Still taking a cut to get a new stage built. Gonna need it done by tomorrow for another show."

Assiar took the jar and winked, waltzing by him with a shimmy of her hips and a snap of her tail. "Then tomorrow you'll get that show. I'll make sure it's even more bombastic than tonight's."

She felt his eyes upon her rear and made sure she gave him a show. The last thing she'd ever want to do was let Garfunkel Gritz indulge in his fantasies with her, but that didn't mean she wouldn't let him have his imagination, especially as the weight of the tip jar felt heavy in her hands.

Assiar cackled to herself as she dressed herself in more sensible clothing for Undermine. She made her way towards the Intercontinental for a night of relaxation after turning the crowd into putty in her hands. The nightlife called to the wild, talented draenei woman, and normally, had she not had a routine to plan for another night, she would have lived it up. It wasn't often that one found themselves in the Goblin's capital city, but she wanted to take advantage of it for the time she was here. Even if the garbage-covered city wasn't someplace she wanted to stay for long.

At least she gave a once-in-a-lifetime performance... at least, till she repeated another one the following evening.

**THE END**



# BLIGHTWICK DAYS

Written by Rudhredion Nightstone



**Undermine buzzed with the constant hum of industry**—a cacophony of clanging hammers, roaring engines, and shouting merchants.

Neon lights flickered above various shopfronts while mechanical signs waved at people on others, casting the grimy streets in shades of sickly green and electric pink on this side of Hovel Hill. In the heart of this chaotic metal jungle was Blizkiqbax Blightwick’s shop, a humble yet notorious spot that catered to the wild whims of goblin ingenuity.

Bliz wiped grease from his hands onto his apron and leaned against the workbench, admiring his latest creation: a compact rocket launcher disguised as a set of brass knuckles. Beside him, Pink Pedalpusher giggled as she reviewed snapshots she’d taken earlier that day—racing hot rods, smoggy sunsets, and candid shots of Bliz mid-project. Her teal-blue hair shimmered under the shop’s flickering fluorescents as she leaned against the hood of a polished hot rod.

“You should smile more when you work,” Pink teased, flipping her camera to show Bliz his serious, grease-streaked expression frozen in time. “You look like you’re plotting a world takeover.”

Bliz smirked, his sharp blue eyes glinting. “World takeovers don’t pay as well as custom rods or explosives, sweetheart.”

Their banter was interrupted by the jingle of the front door. Bliz’s hand instinctively tightened around the large wrench he’d just set down. A goblin stepped inside, clad in a patchwork of leather and spikes, his face obscured by tinted goggles and a bandana. The stranger’s movements were deliberate, his posture too stiff for a casual customer.

“Shop’s closed,” Bliz said flatly, his voice laced with warning.

“Didn’t come to buy.” The goblin’s voice was raspy, each word dripping with menace. “Blightwick, you’ve got unfinished business. The cartel sends its regards.”

In a blur, the intruder drew a pair of serrated daggers, their blades glinting like venomous fangs. Pink yelped and dove behind the hot rod as the assassin lunged. Bliz moved like lightning, raising the hefty wrench to deflect the first strike with a metallic clang.

“Unfinished business? Pretty sure I handed in my resignation,” Bliz quipped, swinging the wrench with surprising speed. The assassin dodged, but the blow still grazed his arm, drawing a sharp hiss of pain.

The shop erupted into chaos. The assassin hurled a smoke bomb, filling the room with a choking haze. Bliz’s vision blurred, but his instincts stayed sharp. He ducked as a dagger sailed past his head, embedding itself in a hanging engine block. Gripping the wrench tightly, he swung it in a wide arc, the impact sending a toolbox crashing into the smoke.

“Pink, stay down!” Bliz shouted, darting through the haze. He caught a glimpse of the hitman’s goggles reflecting the neon lights and swung the wrench again, catching the assassin’s ribs with a sickening crunch.

Pink peeked out from behind a stack of tires, her purple eyes narrowing. She extended a hand, muttering a shadowy incantation under her breath. The assassin froze mid-step, his body convulsing as dark tendrils wrapped around his limbs.

“Got him!” Pink called out, her voice steady despite the chaos.

Bliz seized the opportunity, closing the distance with a powerful swing of the wrench. The blow landed squarely on the assassin’s goggles, shattering them and sending him sprawling to the floor. The hitman groaned, dazed, but still tried to crawl away. Pink’s hex tightened, holding him in place as Bliz delivered the final blow, knocking the assassin unconscious.

The smoke began to clear, revealing the wreckage. Pink emerged from her hiding spot, her hair singed but her spirit intact. “Bliz, your shop!” she exclaimed, gesturing to the smoldering mess.

Bliz wiped sweat from his brow and leaned on the wrench. “Yeah, well, the shop can be fixed. You can’t.” He strode over and pulled her into a tight hug, ignoring the grime and soot smeared between them.

Pink looked up at him, her purple eyes shimmering. “Told you I’m not just gonna stand around next time. Shadow magic’s got its perks.”

Bliz chuckled, brushing a strand of teal hair from her face. “Alright, alright. Guess having a hex-happy partner ain’t so bad. Let’s hope the next customer brings less explosives.”

Outside, the sounds of Undermine carried on, oblivious to the chaos that had unfolded. Bliz glanced at the wreckage, his mind already racing with ideas for

rebuilding—and upgrading. Life in Undermine was never quiet, but with Pink by his side, he wouldn't have it any other way.

**THE END**

# GLOVE GOES BOOM

Written by DBSilver Dragon

Edited by Rease Stoneheart



**"Look! It makes water! Spicy water...danger water..."** The lightforged draenei giggled, shooting at the crabs coming for us.

Out of sheer instinct, my body quickly shifted into my Dracthyr form as I aimed at the creatures, using my abilities to continue fighting. The vorquin that had befriended me not too long ago, alongside two small fae dragons, charged before us, keeping the little (if dangerous) creatures at bay. The fight ended as soon as it began, and the Draenei woman pouted as he finished off the survivors and turned to head back to the base camp that was set up on the Isle.

I couldn't help but smirk at her while we walked, seeing her walk sullenly with that pout puffing up her cheeks. I shifted as we walked, returning to my more human visage form as I reached out to pat her shoulder. "Hey, there will be others to eradicate with your spicy water soon, Clo."

"Aye, I know... but oh, Silver, it was just so much fun," she said, losing her pout to replace it with a broad, laughing smile.

I couldn't help but smile back as we came upon the camp. A goblin caught our attention before we entered it properly and hailed us as he rushed to where

we walked. Crystal clear water splashed around his booted feet, and sweat and seawater covered his brownish-green skin as he skidded before us and took a second to catch his breath."

"Hey, you. Are you Silveri?" he asked in a rough voice, heaving in heavy inhales between each word. "Please tell me you are. I'm tired of running out here askin all you tall people."

"I am," I answered, confused as to why I'd be sought out.

"You sure? You dun look like no dragon I ever seen," he replied, eyeing me as he finally caught his wind. "I was told to look for some silver dragon person."

I blinked again, still confused. Why would he ask me if he wasn't sure who I was? I opened my mouth to speak, stopped, but then shook my head and finally replied, "Well, I'm not always a dragon. You know they have visages, right? But if you want proof, I can give it."

"Yeah, pal, proof would be good," he said, crossing his arms and tapping his foot in the shallow water.

I shrugged and stepped back to give myself space. In truth, the request no longer bothered me when people asked. I felt the well of power deep inside of me, and I started to shift, grumbling as I did so before I began to grow into my normal dracthyr form. I stretched and looked at the man, fanning my wings out, speaking in a low, deeper growl.

"Is this the proof you need?"

The goblin stepped back with widened eyes, hiding behind a laughing Clo. "Y-yeah, pal. Good enough for me," he said, squinting his eyes as the sun caught off my silver scales.

He began to rummage through a pouch at his side, pulling out a small scroll case. "Gotta message for you. None too quick, too; been lookin for yah all week and lemme tell ya, this sun stinks. I wanna get back to my machines."

Then he left, running in the opposite direction of the camp. With no threat around, I shifted back to my human visage as I held the scroll case in my hand and fiddled around with it as Clo towered over me, just as curious. It smelled of oil and grease, with a wafting scent of garbage. Who it could have been from only confused me more.

Without hesitation, I unrolled it, scanning the words written for me as my brows furrowed.

"So... what's it say?" Clo asked, interested.

"Seems like something - or someone - called the Cartel has asked for my services. Why it didn't go through the expedition, though, I don't know."

Clo shrugged and leaned away. "Sounds like your deeds and findings made it to them, you ask me. You're getting pretty famous," she said, reaching for the scroll to read as well.

"Okay, but who are... them?" I asked, handing it over.

She motioned for us to continue walking, and we approached the ship that would take us back to Dornogal. The sounds of the camp were still loud all around us as people barked orders, rushed back and forth, and hammers clanged while animals cried out.

"Well, the Goblin Cartel," she said when a moment of peace settled over the camp.

"You mean like the little guy that ran up to us?" I asked, confused. I still had much to learn about the different races and the political makeup of their cultures. This was one of those times I felt like a fish out of water again.

"Aye. Must be something big if they're requesting outside help," the woman answered, handing me back the scroll.

I took it, pocketed it, and sighed as I sat down atop a sun-warmed boulder, resting while my fingers idly slipped to the vorquin to scritch my fingers through the soft fur of its head. "Well, as they say around camp. Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Clo laughed. "See, you're not even there helping them yet, and you're already talking like a goblin."

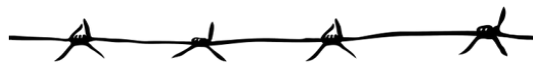
"We'll see about that," I replied, joining in the laughter as the ship we waited on finished its preparations.

"Just make sure to tell me all about it when you return."

"Will you still be taking on the crab population here?" I joked, preparing to launch onto the ship while my companions followed me onto the platform.

"Yep...this spicy water is great." Clo waved. "Dioniss Aca."

I bowed respectfully to her. "Safe journey to you as well," I said, bidding her farewell.



The loud sounds of metal striking metal, music, fighting, and distant arguing assaulted my ears, while the odors of gas, oil, and burning wood assaulted my

nose. My companions shifted uneasily around me, their body language showing they were ready to attack anything that moved.

I could sense their discomfort and felt the same way, truthfully. I pulled a small contraption from my pack and set it on the ground as I knelt, ready to call the vorquin and fae dragons over to me before a shadow loomed above me.

"Hey, hey. No unwanted or unsanctioned gadgets here," a guard called out, smacking his baton in his hand.

"It's alright. I'm just making sure my companions get back safely," I said, looking up at a goblin in spiky metal armor with a scowl.

"Not my problem. Take it up with the bosses," he gruffly replied, thumbing behind him. A part of me wanted to drop my visage and intimidate him into allowing me to use it, but another part thought better of it.

"Okay... Who are these bosses, then?"

"What are ya? Dumb? The Cartel. Who do you think runs the joint? They run everything down here in Undermine."

My eyes widened. That was who I needed to see. "Perfect. They sent me a letter to summon me, so I needed to go and talk to them anyway."

He took a step back. His large ears slightly flopped as he cocked his head and wiped the back of his hand under his nose. "You? Heard they was lookin' for someone but you don't look like no dragon."

"I get that a lot," I muttered, ignoring the order anyway. Placing the device down, I pressed the button atop it, and a small, stable portal instantly appeared as it flashed brightly in the dark, cramped metal hallway.

Seeing their freedom, my companions instantly ran through it, the vorquin yipping in happiness. Once all three were inside, I pressed the button again, and the gadget shrunk back into the palm-sized box meant for transportation.

The dumbfounded guard flabbergasted and sputtered, but didn't stop me. Instead, he just eyed me with a narrowing gaze as I stood up and tried to smile as nicely as possible.

"Now, that's settled. Can you tell me where to find them?" I asked, trying not to feel exposed without them by my side.

"Sure. Incontinental hotel. Big buildin' down the road. Lotta flashy lights. Can't miss the place," he said, pointing out of the hallway's security and towards a large black road in front of the rocket trains. "Just ask the guards."

I nodded and stepped out into the city proper, where I saw what looked like it could have been the place. It was one of the largest buildings in the cramped, dirty city—perhaps one of the better-constructed ones.

To say the roads, and by the Red Lady, the walkways, were dangerous was an understatement. I would rather fight swamp beasts and sludge piles naked and blindfolded than walk these roads. Even the air felt too thick to fly through, so I stayed grounded.

**“Hey, watch it...”**

**“I got what you need...”**

**"The goop goes first, then the slime..."**

**“Payment or knee caps...”**

Sticking close to the building and keeping my eyes open was the only reason I made it to the hotel with all my limbs intact. Inside the hotel, there was chaos—all the races rushing about, the music a bit too loud, and it felt crowded for such a large place. I made my way towards the front desk.

"Name?" The bored goblin behind the counter asked as he knelt his cheek into his knuckles and casually flipped through the paper he was reading.

"Silveri," I said, trying to peer around and ensure I was in the right place.

The Clerk looked up from his paper, licked his finger, and flipped to another page. "You don't-

"Look like a dragon, I know," I said, cutting him off with a sigh. "I'm not going to be in my dracthyr form all the time, alright?"

The Clerk shrugged. "Don't see why not. I was a dragon, I'd do it. be a lot more intimidatin' if ya did." Then he shuffled his flimsy paper aside and leaned towards a tome in the back as his finger traced down a list of names, dates, and more. With a practiced flick of his wrist, he pulled a key from a wall and tossed it towards me. "Here yah go. Guest of the Cartel... well... the new Cartel anyway. Instructions are to meet with them first before you get to your room."

Then he pointed over my shoulder to a large staircase behind me, rich with a plush, if dirty, carpet that ran all the way up. "First door on your left when you turn right."

I wanted to ask a question about those directions further, but a large Tauren shoved against my side, pushing me away as he slammed a rucksack atop the table and growled.

Figuring that was my cue to leave, and not wanting to change and risk starting a fight, I sourly glared at the man and made my way up the stairs. Feeling

the red carpet beneath me be surprisingly springy as I bounced up and followed the directions.

The inside of the hotel was... clean, as far as I knew of the goblins. Admittedly, I didn't know much about them, but my first impression of the city from sights, smells, and sounds was that they were all dirty and that Undermine would be a grease trap. Yet the interior of the hotel was cleanish enough to be relatively hospitable.

Eventually, I found where to go after following the Clerk's directions. A large metal door loomed above me, taller than it needed to be for a goblin. Gathering my courage, I reached out and knocked several times, waiting for a response.

"It's open," a muffled voice replied immediately.

Reaching for the knob, I was met with a richly decorated room that was sparse in furnishings. Only a long, heavy oak table sat in the center with four chairs circling it. There was room on either end of the table for an additional chair.

Four goblins turned their heads in unison the moment I entered. They sat beneath a flickering light from a bulb ready to burst as it hung on a long, thin wire above them. Each of the goblins was dressed in vastly different outfits.

What truly impressed me was how much cleaner the room smelled. Even the hallway initially amazed me, but now it seemed caked in grease and stink. In here, it smelled like a fresh spring breeze. No oil, gas, or burning garbage could be smelled.

I took a deep breath, enjoying the clean air for the first time in hours.

"Thought you hired a dragon," one of the Goblins said. They were dressed in a lab coat with slicked-back hair along his head.

"Dracthyr, Marin. A Dracthyr," another spoke, readjusting his cap on his head.

"Dragon, Dracthyr. Same difference. They got wings and scales."

Tired of being confused the entire time, I growled as I entered. Dropping my visage, I shifted and avoided bumping my head on the ceiling as I grew taller to my normal dracthyr form, unfurling my wings carefully behind me. "Fine. Is this better?" I asked, my voice deeper and rougher than I intended.

At one time, I enjoyed the look of shock when I dropped my visage. I saw the people in front of me wide, their eyes in shock when I changed from what they presumed was a sweeter, innocent, more demure form to what I was. Now? It felt like a chore more than anything.

"Y-yeah. Much better," the one named Marin replied, giving me a thumbs up.

"Alright, now that Marin's happy here, may we continue?" the one with the cap spoke, readjusting his hat. Turning to me, he eyed me up, cleared his throat, and invited me to join the other three. "Sorry 'bout that. Just use whatever form you want, pal. We know it's you."

Thankful to choose what I wanted and no longer having to prove who I was, I bowed my head and snapped back to my human form, taking light steps forward towards the end of the table as I looked at the other three who were there. "Thank you," I said, meaning it.

"Just one more question for yah, though," a female goblin said, eyeing me up. "Do yah fight as Dracthyr or something?"

Her question was genuine, so I answered with a modest smile. "Well, yes. The strength is a boon when I need it."

Satisfied with the answer, the woman nodded and sat back in her chair. "Good 'nuff for me."

"You'd make one heck of a bodyguard," the last goblin said, dressed in a cleaner version of a pirate's outfit. "Heard you were a hunter, though, or something like that. Got no pets on you, I see."

"I didn't bring any that seemed suited for the... environment," I replied, rolling my tongue along the roof of my mouth, trying to think of a diplomatic way to say what I thought—choosing to be more direct. "They're ill-suited for the air here, and the many smells assault their sensitive noses. I thought it best to leave them behind for now."

The capped goblin just shook his head and clicked his tongue. "Ah, you can just come out and say it. Undermine stinks, and ain't no animal with good senses gonna wanna come down here. It's fine; we all know it," he replied, waving his hand before offering it to shake. "Names Monte Gazlowe. Bilgewater Cartel. I'll be what's called an assistant for now and fix you up with what you need while you're here."

I eyed his hand but reached out and shook it, meeting his toothy smile with one of my own. "I feel we'll be working well together, Mr. Gazlowe."

"Good. Cause we did request you personally, ya know."

"Well then, I know you goblins like to 'get down to business,' so shall we discuss why you asked for me? It seems you already have a lot of muscle here willing to work for you directly."

I wanted to understand why they wanted me, partly because my nerves were raw from the surroundings. Being underground wasn't comfortable, despite having done it before.

"Yeah, we do, but honestly? Lotta, that muscle went to their biceps and not enough to their heads," Gazlowe said, returning to his seat.

"Or the most ethical," the female goblin added.

"Ain't that the truth, Grimla," Gazlowe said with a sigh before he swiveled his chair back in my direction. "So yeah. We need your expertise. There's an artifact-invention-whatever you wanna call it that was stolen from Bilgewater, and we need it back."

I raised my brow, confused. The goblins were valued and well-known for their finesse and ability to create off-the-cuff. I used some of their wildest inventions despite knowing so little about them. "Okay, but why not just make another then?"

"Can't. Plans were taken as well."

"So why call it an artifact?"

"Come on, apples and oranges. What's an artifact, even anyway? Does it need to be thousands of years old to be one?" Gazlowe answered, shrugging. "What matters is it's powerful, and if it gets into the wrong hands, it's gonna do some serious damage."

I debated it briefly as I cupped my chin in my hands. He was right in a way, but the artifacts I dealt with in the past had always been ancient items of power that were not all that well understood, even by those who possessed them.

"I suppose that's true, but what am I looking for? Everything I've dealt with has been ancient by today's standard."

"It's an item called 'Vusmiotug.' Before you ask, yeah, it's a weird name, but it's one we settled on because Marin thought 'Fire Glove' was too easy and too long," Gazlowe said, peering over to Marin, who shrugged. "So yeah, you can tell it's a glove of fire and all that jazz. We need you to track it down and recover it. The first step we know is that you got to see Ten Fingers over at Hovel Hill. He'll get you the companions you need to help you out."

The four turned their attention to me for one last second, and I nodded, understanding where I needed to go now, even if I didn't know the exact direction. "I'll need a map, at least," I said.

"Can snag one down by the Clerk. Gottem printed fresh for all the tourists coming in. Costs a gold but eh, we'll put it on our tab," Gazlowe said with a smile.

Knowing I would at least have some help, I turned to leave just as the four huddled together to converse in dropped, muttering voices. Sensing that I was dismissed, and with no further questions, I left, returning to the hallway as I closed the door.

All I knew now was that I needed to find this 'vusmiotug' and meet with someone named Ten Fingers. Feeling confident I'd be equipped, I headed towards the stairs, hoping the rest of the city would be cleaner than my first impressions.



A few guards later, after a few map flips and having found myself lost, found, and lost again, I eventually ended up in front of the workshop I was directed towards. The sounds of hammering metal, cursing, and an odd explosion told me that I was where I needed to be.

Opening the door carefully (in case of another explosion), I peeped inside the workshop. It was filthy with grease that flowed freely, covered in tools and other odd and cumbersome mechanical inventions. Metal floors and walls surrounded me, and a few shafts of light streamed from unopened windows.

"Excuse me? I'm looking for someone named Ten Fingers."

"Upstairs!" someone called out.

Tentatively, I entered further in, making my way up the stairs where I saw it was cleaner, though not by much. Large, gaudy cushions littered the floor, and a huge goblin sat in the corner of the room. Bombs of various sizes and colors surrounded him as he petted them. He looked up at me as I ascended, and I cleared my throat when I saw I had his attention.

"Are you Ten Fingers?"

"Who's asking?"

I blinked. "Me?"

"Right, right. Yep, that's me," he slowly replied, staring at me through heavy eyelids that dropped upon his rounded face. "What do you want?"

As he picked up a smaller bomb to hold as a pet, I blinked and tried to figure out how best to reply. "Gazlowe from the Cartel said you'd have a companion for me?"

"OH! I was expecting you, yeah. Yeah, I got what you need," he said, slowly shifting as he stood up, and I realized how big he truly was. He towered above me, and by the aspects, he would have towered even if I was shifted into my true form. Despite the flabby nature of his body and the seemingly slow, dulled expression on his face, he moved with sure, quiet steps faster than I thought a

man of his size could as he moved towards a small alcove beneath a large window.

He picked up two bombs - one red and one black - and turned to place them down in front of me. They were dented but patched, and he gave a slow whistle as the bombs moved around my feet.

Sheer instinct forced me to step back, growing nervous as they chattered and shivered. Then, two claws appeared underneath them, and they started to move independently. Ten Fingers knelt and nudged them to move where long legs clacked against the floor.

They were crabs with bombs. And their excited chattering echoed off the walls as they moved around my feet.

"Haha, alright, you two. You're gonna help the weird human-"

"Dracthyr," I corrected him.

"...Weird Dracthyr," Ten fingers replied, giving me a sidelong glance. "Weird Dracthyr human with horns. They're gonna need ya."

The bomb crabs clattered up to me as I knelt, and I held my hand to gain their trust better. I feared they would snap at me, but instead, they stood there, bobbing and weaving back as they chattered between them—a good sign for a start. "You've got interesting companions. I never seen anything like them," I said, placing my hand gently on their cool, metal shell.

"Raised them from small crablings that I found on the coast. They liked the bomb homes. They are named TicTic and Boom. You take good care of them."

"As a hunter, I will value their life more than mine."

Ten fingers nodded and went back to his small pile. Goblins were not known to say their goodbyes. It was more of a dismissal and back to what they were

doing. TicTic and Boom followed along behind me. They stayed close, and it was the first time I noticed others moving out of our way. Maybe having boom crabs as companions would make travel a lot easier.



Two companions up, I realized I still didn't have the one thing I needed for this mission: clues. So, I did what anyone else would do in my situation. I asked around.

The place further grated on my nerves. "Hey, toots." A voice called me over. A young goblin holding newspapers motioned me over. "Word around town says you are looking for someone."

"How did..."

"Hey, that is a newsie's job," He grinned. "Some sort of item is what you are looking for." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Not sure if it is gonna be any help, but word around is that there was a tall, lanky dog-looking fella seen jumping out a window clutching something close to him."

"And no one bothered to report it?"

The newsie laughed. "Here in Undermine. It is every goblin for themselves. The police guards here are just as corrupted as Gallywix was. Anyhoo, word be that the dog person headed towards the transport system that leads outta here."

I gave him a small, polite bow and fished two gold coins from my pouch. "For your information..."

He handed me a newspaper. "Thanks for buyin', lady." He gave me a wink before he turned away to hawk his wares again.

At least I had a direction now. Back to where it all started: Slam Central Station. As I approached, the guard who originally questioned me was still there,

but when he saw TicTic and Boom, he only nodded. The station was still busy with races from every corner of Azeroth and beyond, rushing and milling about.

“Where is that furry ba-” The rest of the words drowned in the din of the station.

“Furry?” I thought to myself. I could only be so lucky, but asking around was getting me nowhere. I would have rather been knee-deep in dirt and muck outside than trying to get my bearings or answers in this place.

“I will rip your tail off.” Again, that voice. This time, I followed the sound and was brought face to face with a human mage, black hair cascading down her back and an outfit matching her hair: Black leather and lace and a staff strapped to her back. She looked angry, as though she could truly rip the tail off anyone who crossed her.

“Excuse me,” I said, even but lethal in case she turned her ire on me. “But we may be looking for the same person.”

The mage whipped around, facing me. Her eyes widened. “You are not human.”

“That obvious?” I prepared myself for the statement or question that always followed.

“Yeah, you are Dracthyr,” the mage nodded. The horns gave you away.” She seemed to have calmed down a bit, though her shoulders were still tense. “Good call on the visage. One of these damnable goblins would kidnap you for a sideshow or something.” She chuckled at her bad joke.

“They cannot all be that bad. The few that I have dealt with seem...nice.” I could only shrug.

"Yeah, well, you are still young when dealing with the races, right?" she asked and I only nodded. "Well, let me just say you're lucky to have met the good ones, then." She held out her hand. "You can call me Rae."

Taking her hand in mine, I gently pressed my forehead against her hand. "Greetings, Rae," I said, standing straight once again. "I am Silveri."

"You Dracthyr sure know how to greet a person," Rae smirked. "So, you said we might be looking for the same creature...person."

I nodded. "Seems like a tall dog made off with...something."

Rae laughed. "Yep, that is Yorgen. He is a..."

"Worgen." I finished her sentence. I cocked my head to the side. "Why not just shape-shift back into his human visage."

Rae rubbed the back of her neck. I could see a slight blush creeping down her neck. "We lost at a game of dice, got caught cheating, and I turned over on Yorgen to save my hide."

"So why are you after him?"

"That mutt stole an Amethyst that possesses my magic overflow."

My heart sank at the implications and danger that could be wrought. "Have you asked around?"

Rae only nodded. "But no one is willing to give up answers."

"Maybe I can help?" I placed a hand on TicTic's metal shell.

Rae cocked an eyebrow. "Interesting pets."

"A gift from the Cartel." The words slipped from my lips before I could stop them. "They felt that they would be better suited."

Again, Rae's eyes widened. "That they could. So, what is the plan?"

"We ask around...Or I ask if anyone has seen this Yorgen. I am sure that he would have been easily spotted."

"Good luck."

Rae stuck close to me as I returned to the guard. "Now, since I have the proper companions," motioning towards TicTic and Boom, "can I ask a question?"

"You just did."

I took a step closer, lowered my voice, and let off a draconic growl. "Have you seen a white Worgen go through?"

The guard looked me up and down, coming to rest on my horns. The color drained from his face. He shook his head, trying to regain some color while stepping back. "Y-yeah...yeah, I did. Big, fuzzy, and white came running through, rushing past the guards and heading towards the drill that goes to the Kaja' Coast. None of us could stop him before the drill took off."

"Thank you." My voice once again my own as I stepped and turned away, facing Rae again and giving her a smirk. "There you go."

Rae gave a low whistle. "Then let's head out."

"Drill to Kaja' Coast, ready to depart." An announcer called out.

We rushed towards the drill and managed to board before the heavy metal door closed. It felt cramped and made for much shorter creatures than me. Thankfully, the ride was short and I was more than happy to leave. Salty fresh air greeted us, and I breathed deeply, hoping to eliminate the smell from my lungs. It was good to see a real sky again and not a sun bolted to a pipe.

"Where do we start?" Rae asked me, capturing my attention. I knelt down, examining the various prints in the damp sand—bird, crab, humanoid. One set of

prints stood out, fresh and deep—Worgen prints. They were different from wolves themselves, longer and heavier, and they headed towards the coastline.

“We head towards the coast.” I stood, TicTic and Boom chittered beside us.

“Then let’s get that furry bag of bones,” Rae grumbled. “And if he...”

A loud explosion forced us both to jump and my companions to duck back into their shells. Smoke in the distance gave us our direction. "Best place to start, I guess."

"If he..." Rae snapped her fingers, and a floating disk appeared beneath her, lifting her towards the sky and smoke. I could only launch myself and follow. It felt good having the wind under my wings again. Birds took flight, scattering as I darted past. The stench of sulfur and burnt fur grew stronger as we approached. A small campsite was the source of the smoke. A painful, angry growl could be heard over the crashing waves as we landed.

“It should have worked.” The Worgen growled. A clawed hand outstretched towards the water with a strange device smoldering in his hand. Small fires dotted the air, ashes floating on currents towards the sun.

"You stupid, dimwitted..." Rae grumbled as she headed towards the prone figure, resting on her knees beside the beast.

I carefully removed the glove, which was nothing more than leather straps and a large circular metal disk holding it all together. The disk had several hollows carved into it. A red stone and a purple stone rested in two of the hollows. "He still breathes," I said.

“Why?” Rae asked, watching the Worgen push himself up. “And I will take back my gem.”

"Is this your gem?" I held up the glove so the mage could see the stones.

"The purple one is mine." She cocked her head to the side for a moment. "Arcane gems and fire gems...at least I think it is a fire gem...are dangerous that close together." She remarked, watching while I plucked the purple gem from its socket. A thrum of power coursed through me, and I could only stare at the small gem. I quickly handed the gem to Rae, now being careful of the red gem. "I will make sure Yorgen is taken care of."

"The Cartel is going to want Yorgen to answer." Rae looked up at me once again.

"We will cross that bridge once it is in sight," I said, launching myself into the sky. I could hear bickering and arguing below me.



As I entered, the Cartel waited once again in the meeting room. Gingerly, I placed the glove on the table in front of me. I had also managed to recover a few burned pages from the campsite, which were Unreadable and ready to crumble to ash. Their eyes widened at the sight.

"That stone is infused with black blood," Marin whispered.

"It will be destroyed," Gazlowe commented. "And the one who created it will answer for this."

"What about the Worgen?" I asked.

"What happened to him?" Gazlowe looked towards me, pulling his eyes away from the stone.

"Singed, burned, and in pain."

"Then he got what he deserved." Gazlowe nodded. He tossed a small bag of coins towards me. "For your services. And you will always have a place here."

“What about TicTic and Boom? They have to go back.”

"Nah, I spoke with Ten Fingers; they're yours now. He said you did good with them, and they like you."

"I will be getting some interesting comments," I muttered. "More than I already get."

"Yeah, but now with a heap of respect," Revilgaz said. "You will be the one in command of them."

I only shook my head. "I am going back to learn about the past." With that, I turned and left with a small pouch of coins and two new companions at my side. "Clo is going to love you two," I said, patting the metal shells. "Let's go find out what is hidden."

**THE END**

SILVER WITH TIC TIC AND BOOM



# The Blessing of the Lunar Cycles

Written by Angela Ridder



*The Moonwell, Ashenvale Forest, Kalimddor - Mennare 10th, 10,044 P.S.*

---

**The night was dark and very cold in Ashenvale Forest.** The moon's light was mostly blotted out by the thick canopy, but in some places beams of moonlight lanced through, illuminating the area quite well. It was beautiful in a dark way. Ahead, the waters of the moonwell shimmered a bright silvery blue.

It was the perfect night for a dark ritual.

Kneeling by the moonwell was a woman. Her head bowed deeply in prayer; she wore the traditional robes of a Priestess of the Moon. To her left and right lay a bow and a glaive, respectively. Before her lay open a small book. The pages were inky black with silver writing. Her angelic voice carried across the clearing; she was chanting a prayer.

Walking at Eras'tien's side was Mal'ache Starstalker, who let her gaze, for but a moment, inspect her grandson. He walked stiffly and was visibly nervous as they approached the chanting priestess by the Moonwell. Reaching over, she placed a gloved hand on his shoulder, offering him a comforting squeeze.

Releasing him a moment later, she signed at him with her hands to let him know he did not in fact have to go through with this.

Eras'tien was clad in simple white robes; the robes were paper thin and did nothing to hold back the night's freezing cold. A cold chill shot up along his spine. He only carried with him a few things. A sheathed ritual dagger, a moon silver thurible that billowed with strong-smelling incense, and clean white bandages.

With each step that Eras'tien took, the damp grass tickled his bare feet. He glanced down at the robes he wore. They were the traditional ritual robes of a Moon Priestess—his mother's robes, to be exact.

It felt odd wearing them; he felt unworthy. "I know, but I want to, Grandmother." He finally answered, his voice filled with determination.

Mal'ache simply nodded and offered him a supportive smile. She did not speak; she never did. But Eras'tien could tell she was proud of him.

Looking ahead, his grandmother regarded the kneeling figure by the moonwell. A look of grim determination set on her face.

Eras'tien wanted to ask about her look, but before he could, he realized they were too close for him to ask something like that. He made a mental note to inquire later. As they drew closer to the kneeling woman, he bowed his head in respect of her prayer. The hand in which he held the thurible moving back and forth slowly, swinging the object back and forth. It was a well-practiced motion, one that he could not help but feel comforted by, a comforting routine he could at least focus on that was not this big moment.

“Eras’tien Illseth Volteal.” The kneeling woman’s voice was soft, melancholy. The rudeness of it almost made him jump. “It gladdens my old heart to see that you did not turn tail and run from this, like so many other menfolk before you have.” She did not look back at him; she simply remained bowing as she spoke.

“I would not dare back down from this.” He said with an even voice; he was, however, afraid. But he was not a coward. “To walk the Goddess’ path is to give oneself to it; this is merely another step.”

The woman chuckled lightly. “You say that so confidently, but your voice fails to cover your fear, your stance reveals the instinctual urge to flee.” She accused him without even looking back. “But... you are not so different from your mother all those years ago, though she was, but a child back then.” She said as she finally turned to face him and Mal’ache. “Do you think you will be able to handle it, Eras’tien? Will you be the first male to succeed? To survive?”

Swallowing nervously, Eras’tien managed to nod at the woman. He knew her well, Yllandria Lunarshine. She was the priestess who he had met during his pilgrimage, the one who had helped him, and as he now knew his Grandmother’s sister. “Your holiness, with all due respect, I am here; I am ready. Trepidation and fear for what is about to happen is no shame.” He spoke softly but firmly. “I will be, after tonight, irrevocably altered. But I am here all the same; my faith in Her is stronger than my fear.” His voice held reverence for her position, but he would not stand to be insulted by her.

Yllandria smirked. She was hard to read to him, though he could tell she was pleased by his reply. Her gaze shifted then, regarding Mal’ache. “And you. The Heretic Sister.” She mused. “Why are you here?”

“She is with me.” Eras’tien said firmly.

Yllandria scoffed at that, but did not push the matter. Instead, she motioned to a spot on the grass. “Grab a seat, heretic, and keep your mouth shut.”

Without a word, Mal’ache clapped Eras’tien on the shoulder and found a place to sit down. She cared not for the priestess’ words, but her contempt was silent. She kneeled down, hands in her lap. Watching behind her blindfold.

“Well, child, are you ready?” Yllandria prompted, pulling Eras’tien’s attention back to her.

“Yes, Priestess.” He said softly.

Yllandria nodded and walked up to the bowl, sitting on the edge of the moonwell. She did not speak, chant, or even pray; she simply took the ritual knife from her belt and slit her hand with it. Rending open her palm deeply. She let her dark purple blood flow freely into the bowl.

Eras’tien came closer as the Priestess motioned him to. She took his hand in hers and cut his palm with the same brutal efficiency. Letting their blood mix with the abyssal liquid already inside the bowl.

Eras’tien spoke after having his palm slit. “Blessed Goddess Elune, I, your humble servant, beseech thee to bless this sacrifice of light and dark, of life and death so willingly given.” He took a vial of moonwell water from the rim and poured it into the bowl.

The reaction was immediate.

The mixture of unknown fluid, blood, and moonwell water started roiling like it had been brought to a heavy boil. Bowing his head, he dumped the bowl out into the waters of the moonwell and watched as the well water first turned pitch black, then ivory, and then its surface reflected the current moon phase back up at them.

Taking a deep breath, Eras'tien climbed into the edge of the moonwell. A muttered prayer followed, and then he stepped into the water, no ripples moving along the surface even as he lowered himself into the waters. Closing his eyes as his head went under. There was a moment of fear, absolute terror, at the knowledge that some did not survive what was about to happen. He speared that fear with his faith. The goddess would protect him. She would keep him safe.

Opening his eyes was the final step. It stung. The water of the moonwell stung heavily. It was like being stabbed in the eyes with countless burning hot needles. He wanted himself to remain calm. Finally, he breathed in. Putting his faith in the fact that he should be able to. Much like he had been promised, he found that he was able to breathe. Pure pitch blackness surrounded him; he floated in what seemed to him an endless abyss.

He finally understood why many would fail. The creeping feeling of isolation in the darkness was terrifying. There was no way to determine which direction was up or down. Gravity was gone. There was no indication he was in a moonwell; it was like he had been transported to the darkest depths of the ocean.

He breathed evenly and centered himself. He allowed himself to slip into a well-trained meditative state. His thoughts cleared, and his breathing steadied. Time passed slowly; it felt like an eternity. As the darkness played tricks around him, he heard things that could not possibly be there.

He heard things he knew to ignore. The voices of friends, family members, and those long dead. Calling his name, pleading for help, and begging him to join them in eternal joy. His instincts told him to move and told him to reply. The longer he ignored the voices, the more frantic they became, until finally they twisted into guttural growls and maddened howls of unknowable horrors that lurked beyond the darkness.

Finally, he was plunged into silence. He was so suddenly plunged into a world of utter silence. Overwhelming, oppressive silence. Panic started to set in as he was unable to hear even his own breathing. He was about to scream, about to look, when comforting warmth washed over him. A caress like pale moonlight enveloping his form.

“Open your eyes, young one.” A tender voice spoke to him. “See the world through my eyes.”

He opened his eyes, watching the abyss gain flecks of silvery light. He watched on as the flecks grew and started warring with the darkness; it was a delicate tug of war. That created a kaleidoscope of colors. His emotions went haywire. He laughed, sobbed, and then screamed with irrational and incoherent rage. All emotions hit at the same time, and it felt like this was how he was going to lose his mind.

This went on in such fierceness, such wild swings, that he finally felt intense fear. He was scared for his life, for his well-being, and for his connection to his wife. For everything, his dominant emotion just became fear, which spiraled into anxiety and depression and into loathing for the woman doing this to him.

Eras'tien screamed at the top of his lungs, and then finally the fear stilled, and he noticed that he was sitting up. Breathing air. The moonwell had gone back to its normal silvery color, yet its brightness was more intense than ever before for him. His emotions were a chaotic mess; they would be for days to come.

Finally, he looked around. The world was dark; the only light that seemed to illuminate the world around them was the starlight and the moon above. The world was different.

“The only light you will ever see is hers.” Ylandria spoke with an air of finality. “Night will be day, and day will be night.” She nodded simply.

Eras'tien's eyes finally settled on her and he smiled slightly as he saw her embraced by a soft halo of radiant moonlight. He had seen auras before, but hers, for such a woman, was rather elegant. However, as he turned to regard his grandmother Mal'ache, he looked horrified.

Taking in the gangly arms of the shadowy monstrosity that sat a short distance away. A skeletal face regarded him with malice, wicked claws that could easily eviscerate a man clenched and unclenched waiting to be used. Amid it all, the scared-looking young highborne woman was trapped and cowering. She looked away, her ears visibly drooping in the shadowy form.

“Yes, look upon the face of a heretic.” Whispered Ylandria. “Look upon it and contemplate what you associate with it.” She hissed with full judgment audible in her voice.

Eras'tien was about to say something when he noticed that Mal'ache was gone. He would never get used to her ability to just vanish. “I...” he whispered

softly. He never finished his sentence and simply stepped from the moonwell. He felt different; he felt melancholy, his mood darkening intensely.

As he looked up and regarded the moon that shone through the holes in the foliage. He felt a sense of sorrow from it. "Blessed be she who receives the goddess's favor; woe be to she who earns her ire." He whispered to himself as he walked away from Yllandria and the moonwell. Cold rain started to come down around them both.

Eras'tien could not shake the wrongness of what had been done. There were no clouds in the sky; it was almost like the goddess herself wept over innocence lost. The rain drenched the forest in the crying moon's ivory tears.

The End



**ART GALLERY**

Heya Toots

Drawn by MIschi



Rudhredion Nightstone Archeologist

Submitted by Rudhredion Nightstone

Drawn by GhoulisH



Dough and Pazi

Drawn by Emmastudios



EMMA'S\_ARTSTUDIO

DOUG:IT x PAZI

Got the next batch of safety inspections, we've got about ten new injuries from safety violations.

T-ten?! What about the guys we s-sent out to repair some of the damages?

Repairs? The boss cut the repair crew. It ain't even halfway done dollface.

### Rossy's New Job

Drawn by  
Wildheart

*Tell him if he keeps cutting corners I'll CUT corners OFF OF HIS FACE!!*

Yes ma'am! R-right away ma'am!





Prizy and Marik Relaxing

Submitted by Holn

Drawn by Palehorn Tea

Dame Shalaine Belford | Submitted by Shalaine Belford | Drawn by Hanabiraa

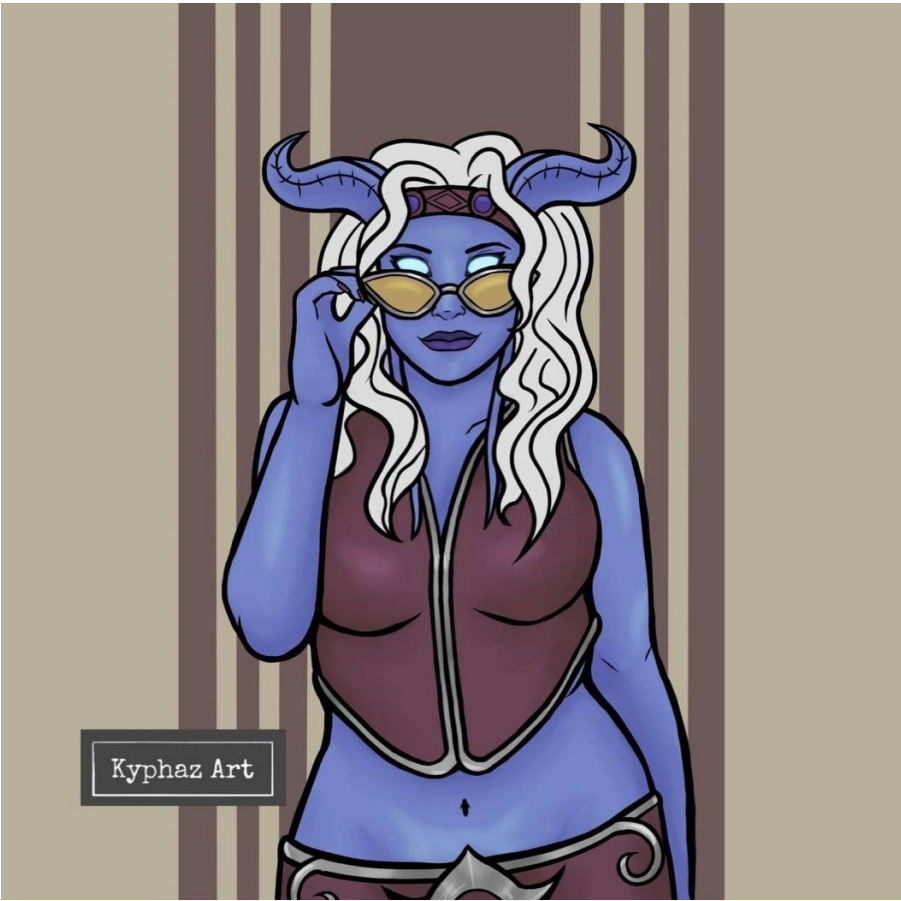


Raszagoose Vs Odion

Submitted by Holn AKA A Lotta Ppl

Drawn by Palehorn Tea





Kyphaz Art

Sassy Assiar  
Submitted by Assiar  
Drawn by Kyphaz Art

Shalaine Masked  
Submitted by Shalaine  
Drawn by Wraith



# WE CAN DO IT!



TEEMO MANABREAK  
DRAWN BY WRAITH

BY 195

Assiar Bust

Submitted by Assiar

Drawn by Lilena Talem



Bianca | Submitted by Holn AKA A Lotta Ppl | Drawn by Palehorn Tea



TIMPANUS -- FIST OF THE EMPEROR

DRAWN BY CROSSWORLDS



A Day At The Races | Submitted by Ruhredion Nightstone | Drawn by Sonceri





Pip The Hero and Darisal | Submitted by Holn AKA A Lotta Ppl  
Drawn by Palehorn Tea

Johanna Battles The Gnolls | Submitted by Holn AKA A Lotta Ppl  
Drawn by Palehorn Tea



ZEZILI THE PURE

DRAWN BY REVA



Eanthal Stallard Working

Submitted by J.S.

Drawn by Ayie\_Olaer



Eanthal Stallard Relaxing

Submitted by J.S.

Drawn by Ayie\_Olaer





SMichelle 2005

Sasha Turner - Pirate Menace | Drawn by Wolfsong Wildheart

# THE HAMMER

Written by Eluvianna



**Eluvianna entered the tavern, taking in the din of Undermine's moral wasteland:** mostly minor crime bosses, expatriated mages, and felonious goblins—each engaged in either raucous haggling or the solitary theater of their own menace.

She slid a leaf of paper across the bar, offering the barkeep a glance.

With a crack, the goblin unfolded a small stool. He heaved atop it with audible effort, peering closer. Then, with a nod, he cut his gaze down the bar.

Eluvianna followed, brow arching at the presence in question.

It was an Ethereal. And a truly pathetic one—slumped over, flickering in either unconsciousness or deep existential crisis.

Someone had forgotten to plug him in last night.

Was he drunk? Was that even possible?

Having lost interest, the barkeep hopped off the stool, now offering his indifference to the grunts of two impatient orcs.

Eluvianna sighed, sidestepping a very suspicious-looking scorch mark before settling beside the cosmic heap face down on the bar.

For a moment, she just watched.

No movement. No response. Just arcane energy crackling through the slits of his bandages.

Under her breath, “gods, is this thing even alive?”

Nothing.

Then, an innocent hiccup.

With a sway, the figure attempted to peel himself from the wood, barely managing a slurred response.

“Def-fine...alive.”

A hand lifted with a vague flourish.

“This...I like what you’ve got going on here,” the gesture didn't quite follow the words.

“Love—” another hiccup, “—a strong thematic commitment.”

Then a nauseated cough.

Eluvianna leaned on an elbow. “You’re surprisingly sharp for someone who was barely coherent just a moment ago.”

The Ethereal made a vague ‘yeah, yeah’ motion, as if he had heard this complaint before.

He lurched upright, aiming for a formal tone. Surprisingly well.

“In the world of interdimensional business, being perceptive is almost as good as being respected.”

“Wait.”

“Was it—” He paused. Flickered. Counted half the fingers on each hand. Repeated. Frowned.

He hesitated, then snapped his fingers—or tried to. The sound was noticeably absent.

“Was it...entertaining? Yes yes.” He gave a self-satisfied nod, as if having solved some great mystery.

“Naturally.”

He turned, still managing to look uncoordinated. “Especially when dealing with cultists—”

Eluvianna shook her head. “Not a cultist.”

An unnecessary A-OK gesture.

Eluvianna rested her chin on one hand, eyes roaming.

“For someone known as The Hammer, there seems to be a distinct lack of the implement on your person.”

He immediately straightened, suddenly very aware of where this conversation was going.

“Ahhhh,” he lifted a single finger in protest.

“I can explain,” following with a sickened gulp and rough clear of his throat.

“Just...gimme a second to figure out my angle here.”\*

**THE END**

TO THOSE WHO STILL SENSE WHAT SHIFTS BENEATH,

THIS BLACK BLOOD DOES NOT POOL—IT MOVES.

IT BREATHES. IT SEEPS THROUGH THE WORLD'S WOUNDS,  
UNSEEN YET EVERYWHERE. UNDERMINE IS BUT ONE FRACTURE.

★ WHERE HAVE YOU HEARD AWAKENINGS? WHAT HAVE YOU SEEN? ★

THIS IS NOT ROT. THIS IS SOMETHING OLDER. SOMETHING PATIENT.

AZJ-KAHET. SILITHUS. ICE ENTOMBED BENEATH NORTHREND.

THE DEPTHS OF THE WORLD, THE HALLS OF THE DEAD.

SANITY MAY BE JUST A SUGGESTION,

*Eluriana Umbrafstar*

# A SIMPLE ROBBERY

## PART I — BREAKING AND ENTERING

Written by Sanguinia



*Note: This is part of an ongoing story.*



**"Gentlemen!"**

The Pandaren in black leather raised a paw. "I'm a girl, actually."

"...Right. Take a seat."

The Worgen in robes threw himself heavily into one of the bar's old chairs and worked hard to project his annoyance. He popped the cork off a bottle of cheap rum with his fangs and downed half of it in seconds. "Make your pitch fast, goblin. I can only tolerate this reeking cove for so long."

Veqeti Greelzak nervously adjusted his knit cap. "Hehe, yeah, nobody ever accused Booty Bay of being pleasant environs." He paused, hoping for a friendly response. The Worgen just swallowed the rest of his bottle. The Pandaren seemed like she wasn't even listening as her eyes darted around the room. "Aaaaanyway, let's start at the beginning. I've spent months looking for the right me- er, team for this job. You two came highly recommended. Every Warlock I talk to says nobody beats Landen Thorpe when it comes to Demonology, and every assassin in the underworld says Ju-Hee Sweetwind is on the cutting edge of magical stealth.

Ju-Hee giggled and made an 'Oh, stop,' motion with her paw, but Thorpe just glared impatiently at his empty rum bottle. Veqeti started talking faster. "What I've got planned is nothing less than the heist of the century, and I need your exact abilities to pull it off. If you're in, you'll be generously compensated by my client." He paused for effect. "Ten-thousand Stormwind Crowns. Each."

The wolf-man's full attention was suddenly on the goblin, and the girl's eyes went round at the figure. "Alright," Thorp said, "I'll hear you out. What do you have in mind?"

As the fear that he might be killed started to ebb, Veqeti's voice gained a slightly smug edge. "Just a simple smash and grab. Frankly, getting there is most of the challenge. You two play your part in making the landing happen and then watch my back once we're inside. The whole thing'll be done and dusted fifteen minutes after insertion. I've got the layout, and I know exactly how to get around

their security. With any luck, they won't even realize they've been hit until I've got the treasure back on my ship."

The Pandaren made an "ooh," sound in appreciation of his description, but the Worgen still seemed skeptical. "What's the mark, green man? Must be big for this kind of pay. We fleecing some pirate hold or nicking a wizard's bauble?"

With a flourish, Vegeti threw a parchment onto the table and let it unfurl itself. Ju-Hee started clapping excitedly. Thorp's eyes stopped radiating annoyance, but only because they were occupied by shock. "You may have heard of the place. The Draenei call her 'The Vindicaar.'"



Even after several years, Vindicator Kaldarra struggled to believe Azeroth's beauty. One thing fighting the Burning Legion had shown her was how barren the cosmos was. Someone once told her this wasn't necessarily true. The Army of Light's battles had taken them to only a fraction's fraction of the stars, let alone the worlds that circled them. Most of those were close to the Legion's path of destruction and thus more likely to have been burned or plundered by their Crusade.

Still, it was hard to deny the evidence of one's own eyes. Her memory overflowed with images of empty rocks and fel-soaked wastelands. Azeroth, as it twirled beneath the crystal window, was a work of art by comparison. So much blue. So much green...

"Deep in thought again, Little One?"

Kaldarra rolled her eyes and glanced poutily over her shoulder. "How many thousands of years must pass before you stop calling me that, Fareeya?"

Her commander laughed a warm laugh. "But you're still a full head shorter than me!"

She's so unlike me, Kaldarra thought. Fareeya's Lightforging had gifted her pristine silver skin instead of pale gold. Her horns were tall and proud rather than curved in on themselves. Her tail was short and agile, suited to a soldier, not a thin, willowy tendril that nearly touched the ground. Her long, blonde hair was always straight and perfect, even in the most intense battles, not a wavy mess barely tamed by a braid. Of course, the biggest difference was obvious. "EVERYONE is a full head shorter than you, you ridiculous mountain of a woman. You could stomp an Antean Light-Breaker flat without chipping a hoof."

Kaldarra didn't see the Captain's hand move, but she felt the sting of a flick to her forehead. There hadn't been even a glimmer in Fareeya's eyes to give away the attack. She wasn't second to the High Exarch for nothing. "You're lucky I like you, Vindicator, or I'd have you polishing bulkheads for your insubordinate little mouth."

"Hmph. If you want to punish me, give me a job that will take longer, like bending you over and polishing your not-so-little a-"

"Why are you here when you clearly don't want to be, baby sister?"

The question knocked the next three insults out of Kaldarra's head. She scrambled for a new one to avoid answering. "I let 'Little One' slide, but don't call me 'baby sister.' You know I hate it. I don't care how much you and the others pine for the days when I was that cute child who struggled to lift her hammer in training. That's not who I am anymore."

Fareeya let her smile dim and sighed. "Alright, you win. But seriously, as your Captain, you don't have to sit up here on sentry duty. The Vindicaar will get along fine without you. I know things were rough on your detached service last year, but everyone can see you aren't happy. You want to be down there. If you're feeling anxious after your injury, it doesn't have to be a field assignment. A desk job in one of the Alliance cities will give you a chance to enjoy life. You deserve that."

Kaldarra turned back to the window, hiding her face. "You say that like I'm the only one. We all fought the Legion for years beyond count. We all won the war."

"You were a child when we fled Argus. You've never had a real life."

"You were a famed warrior with rank and privilege. You had a rich and fulfilling life stolen from under you. Why don't *you* take a desk job and enjoy yourself?"

Fareeya grimaced. "That's not the same thing. Besides, I have to be here as long as Turalyon rules the humans as Regent. I am his second. Command is my duty. I hope you haven't forgotten that-"

"Nothing is heavier than duty," Kaldarra interrupted, "so it must be the first and last thing we carry.' Is standing my post regardless of my feelings not living those words, Captain?"

In the crystal, the reflection of Fareeya's face grew sad, triggering a wave of mild guilt in Kaldarra's gut. The Captain laid a hand on her subordinate's shoulder. "I know you don't want to be coddled. I won't say I was never guilty of it, but I swore to never indulge that instinct again after you were Lightforged. Yet, with the war over... we raised you. Can you blame us for wanting you to be happy?"

Unable to endure this form of attack, Kaldarra allowed herself some honesty. "I will be, Fareeya. I just... need a little more time. Please."

Fareeya sighed and withdrew her hand to perform a salute. "Carry on, Vindicator." As the woman departed, Kaldarra looked down on Azeroth again and waited for change.





The clamor of metal and steam as the *Golden Comet* broke orbit was familiar to Veqeti, but his co-conspirators seemed unwilling to take his word that they were completely safe. Story of his life! Once again, Goblin Engineering's unjustly maligned reputation had a couple of laymen thinking they could tell better than an expert what it sounded like when a fragile shell holding back the vacuum of space was about to crumble around them!

The master alarm lit up, warning of an explosive decompression in eight seconds. Veqeti slammed the console with a wrench, and it stopped blinking. Eight seconds later, after they didn't die, he wondered why people couldn't find it in their hearts to put more trust in the miracle of Goblin technology. Sadly, there was no time for such philosophical pondering.

With a grunt, he locked the controls, swiveled his plush velvet pilot's chair around, and brushed past the beaded curtain dividing the cockpit from the passenger compartment. Master Landen sat completely still on one of the zehvra-print couches, arms crossed, acting like the places where his claws had ripped apart the upholstery in a fit of terror did not exist. Ju-Hee was underneath the opposite couch, but the fear that had driven her there seemed to have evaporated after she found a half-eaten bag of peanuts Veqeti dropped there last month.

The goblin reached over his head, pulled a receiving device off the wall, punched in a six-digit code, and spoke calmly so his words would carry over the speaker system to the people sitting three feet away. "Attention, passengers! This is your captain speaking. In approximately seven minutes, this vessel will enter the detection range of the Vindicaar's sensors. Prior to that point, we'll be executing the plan to effect our covert boarding action. Please proceed to your designated duty stations in a calm and orderly fashion. Thank you, and have a pleasant day."

Peanuts in hand, Ju-Hee crawled out from her safe space and sat on an "X," that had been hastily painted at the exact center of the ship's mass. She stuffed the last of the delicious, salty morsels into her mouth and then assumed a cross-legged stance before closing her eyes and steadying her breath. Landen, grumbling all the while to distract himself from his trembling knees, began thumbing through a hefty grimoire, seeking the unusual enchantment the goblin's plan called for. "This whole idea is daft. Modifying a summoning ritual like this is going to produce useless demons."

"Useless demons are what we want!" Vegeti shouted back for what felt like the fiftieth time. "You said 'I get it,' during the briefing!"

"I wanted you to stop talking."

"Look, if you want to start a Fifth War, go ahead and call out demons that can actually hurt Alliance soldiers on a Goblin's orders. I'm sure they'll care a lot about the fact that I'm not even with the Bilgewater Cartel before they start inquisitioning half of Kalimdor!"

Ju-Hee's eyes popped open. "Is 'inquisitioning' a word? I don't think that's a word."

"WOULD YOU MEDITATE ALREADY?!"

"Well, I'm trying, but you two are being very noisy!"

Veqeti sighed and left the others to their work. It wasn't a moment too soon: a cloud of micro-meteors had appeared directly in their flight path. As the rocks bounced off the hull, he grappled with the controls to maintain their heading. Through his porthole, he saw a speck of gold glint against the vast expanse of the universe. It was growing larger.

"T-Minus four minutes to the detection perimeter, T-Minus six to impact with the Vindicaar's hull. We're going to need that stealth magic real quick."

Ju-Hee breathed deeply. She felt all her thoughts trickle away. Her hunger, her nervousness, her bemusement of the cosmic joke that was existence and its complete lack of meaning, her hope to see some brawny Draenei men on this trip; it all flowed down the river of her soul like so much detritus. Space was not a void. Even the shadowy pit the Old Gods called home was not a void. She was a void. She was nothing... and therefore, she could not be seen.

Her body began to rise a few inches off the deck plates, and inky waves of magic spread out from her shadow. They passed through the ship, utterly intangible, and wrapped around the hull like a black cocoon. A moment later, as far as the rest of the creation was concerned, the *Golden Comet* was gone.

Seeing the Pandaren carrying out her task prompted Landen to start chanting. His voice, made coarse as sandpaper by the Worgen curse, became more akin to a bundle of razor wire as the language of demons leaped off his tongue and scorched the air. Eerie green light formed jagged symbols and perfect circles around him. He paced his incantations with exceptional care. Timing would

be everything if they were to avoid detection. Miscalculating by even a few seconds would spell disaster.

The *Comet* cleared the debris, and its course steadied... but unbeknownst to the crew, a single rock had caught itself on one of the ship's most essential parts. The tiny ball of stone and iron had jammed itself in one of the heat radiators, and it soon began to glow as waste heat from the ship's operations washed over it. Then, it started to melt. Liquid rock and metal found themselves drawn into the radiator's mechanisms by the rocket's minuscule but highly proximate gravity.

When it touched something important, the entire array exploded.

The ship rocked to the side and started to spin clockwise. Alarms began screaming. Red emergency lights washed over the ship's cabin. Landen tumbled out of the center of his magical array and slammed against the wall, all breath leaving his lungs as inertia pressed his body against the bulkheads. The light within the demonic circles went out. Ju-Hee hovered just high enough off the floor for everything else to spin around her, and her thoughts became preoccupied with the image of being in the eye of a hurricane, inches away from being ripped apart by its winds. She felt... well, it didn't matter. She felt SOMETHING, which meant she wasn't "nothing." The rocket's shadowy cloak began to fracture.

Veqeti felt like the ship's controls would rip his arms from his torso as he fought them, desperate to calm his wounded creation before it came apart. "Come on, baby! You can handle a few nicks! I built you tough! You know the treasure that's waiting for me in that golden fortress! I know you can get me there in one piece!"

The pilot spared a glance at his dashboard—45 seconds to detection, just shy of three minutes to impact. He put every fiber of his muscles, and a mighty

roar to boot, into the attitude controls... and the spinning came to a wrenching halt. He even found a few spare drops of strength to get the nose back on target. "LET'S GO, YOU TWO! WE GOT NO TIME!"

His fear replaced with seething rage and a desire to taste the inside of a goblin's throat, Landen Thorp pulled himself together and scrambled back to his position at the center of the summoning spell. He wasn't going to die on this fool's errand... but if he did, he wouldn't let his reputation be ruined from beyond the grave. Without missing a single syllable, he picked up the chant and upped the tempo of his incantation. No one would say this plan failed on his account!

Vegeti nodded approvingly at the Worgen's actions... but noticed the stealth shield hadn't recovered. Now that the ship wasn't spinning around her, Ju-Hee was doing everything she could to retrieve her calm... but it wasn't working.

"Sister, you got 20 seconds to make us disappear! What's the hold up?!"

"I... I CAN'T! I JUST CAN'T! I NEED TIME!" Her voice trembled with emotion.

Vegeti grimaced. He'd hoped he wouldn't have to use his trump card, but there was no choice now. Reaching across his control panel, he found a huge red button shielded under glass and smashed his fist straight through the protection.

*"Emergency Meditation Assistant now online."*

The red emergency lighting suddenly swapped to a soothing blue. The alarms were silenced, and in their place appeared the sounds of fresh spring rain, birdsong, and chimes. Lit incense popped out of hidden compartments in the walls, and a mechanical arm dropped from the ceiling with a steaming mug of green tea, which it tipped it gently against Ju-Hee's lips.

She drank. She inhaled the scent of cinnamon and sandalwood. She sighed contentedly... and the ship disappeared again.

Landen stopped chanting and stared. "Is this job a prank? Are you two pranking me?"

"FINISH THE DAMN SUMMONING, OLD MAN! YOU'VE GOT ONE MINUTE AND FIFTY SECONDS!"

For the first time since they'd met, Landen offered a smirk to his employer. "Who do you think you're talking to, goblin? The spell's done. Just watch the fireworks."



Kaldarra rubbed her eyes and squinted into the black again. She was certain she'd seen a brief flash of red out there. It had almost looked like an explosion. A glance at the central dias said the sensors detected nothing, but she could have sworn...

Her thought was interrupted by a blaring alarm. Across the command center, Lightforged stopped their conversations and put their hands on their weapons. A voice came over the speaker system: "Fel energy detected within defense perimeter. Energy spiking at 1-7 decimal 2-8! Pattern reads as Code 384: Demonic Summoning Portal!"

Kaldarra rushed to the great window and looked upward to the coordinates the voice had called out. She almost couldn't believe it as three wreaths of green fire bloomed into being among the stars. After a moment's pause, a green-veined meteor streaked out of each of them. Their trajectory was obvious: they would strike the Vindicaar's highest levels.

"ALL HANDS, BRACE FOR IMPACT!" she shouted.

The soldiers around her heeded her order just in time. All three rocks hit at once, shaking the entire ship. They did not pierce the hull... but they did sprout limbs and begin ripping themselves an entrance.

"Infernals. But how-"

From behind her, the voice of Captain Fareeha rang out: "Those of you wondering how this happened will have to put your curiosity on hold. We have work to do!" Kalderra turned and saw the Army of Light's leader hoist her Light-infused halberd to command the room's attention.

"Initiate full security lockdown. Seal off every deck below the command center. Anyone left down there will have to sit tight. We can't risk demons getting their hands on the relics we're storing in the lower levels. We'll move up together and reinforce the first response teams. Seal everything behind us to protect the Crown of the Triumvirate. I want this filth off my ship! UNDERSTOOD?!"

Every Draenei in the room replied with a rousing battle cry and the sound of hooves charging into action... except for Vindicator Kalderra. She remained silent as her eyes drifted back to that spot where she'd seen a burst of fire among the stars.



In one of the Vindicaar's cargo bays, the cone-shaped nose of a goblin rocketship popped open. The pilot took a bold step onto the golden deck plates. As he planned, there wasn't a single Lightforged there to greet them. The infernals had struck the ship's highest point and drawn everyone's attention at the exact moment he had crashed through the walls. His intel had told him the mighty vessel had no mechanism to differentiate the origin points of multiple,

simultaneous impacts against its hull. The crew's eyes and demonic energy sensors had told them the infernals alone had caused their flying castle to shake. The infiltration was a complete success.

With a grin, Veqeti unslung his rifle and cocked back the hammer. His warlock and assassin comrades emerged from the ship and flanked him on both sides, unable to hide their excitement. Whatever happened next, this would be a story for the underworld's history books.

"Let's keep it snappy, people. What I'm here for isn't going to steal itself."

**TO BE CONTINUED**

# FINE PRINT

Written by Domark Corvicollis

Edited by Rease Stoneheart



**Deep in Icecrown, the dead mingled uselessly as they attacked everything in their paths,** including each other. They were found everywhere: in the trenches of old battles, along marching paths where armies once moved, and in the hidden dips and crags of mountains and hills.

Everything that they could get their hands on was fair game to the mindless minions of a long-dead King.

Overhead this ancient battlefield, the sound of a plane was the only thing that cut over the din of crying, screaming dead. At a height that frosted the tips of the wings, a biplane of gnomish make made of the black metal saronite cut through the clouds as a stream of steam from the burning engine left a trail of condensation behind. The engine's heat kept the biplane aloft, ensuring it didn't freeze and plunge into the frozen hell below.

At the helm, Kilivon Pulsenozzle - a black-haired gnome with a penchant for smirks - turned towards his passenger and friend, Mylmeld Wrenchbomb - a goblin with sharply pointed ears, a sharper nose, and a penchant for grins.

"How we holding up over there?" Kili asked, shouting above the engines' roars.

The goblin gave a grin that had been on his face since his death and threw a thumbs-up. "Looking good, Pulsenozzle!" he yelled back.

Kili nodded and turned back to the control board of the plane. "Good. We'll be in the bombing range at t-minus thirty. How much did you pack in there today?"

"Heh, enough to leave a crater in the ice, that's for damn sure. Don't you worry about the payload. Just worry about the frostwurm that's been circling around those old Vrykul villages," Wrenchbomb answered.

Kili narrowed his eyes beneath his goggles, scanning the various gauges and equipment that displayed a multitude of needles and pointers for fuel, altitude, and ammunition they had on board the plane. One needle in particular was the center of his focus. One that told him they neared their target.

"Coming into range shortly!" Kili yelled, leaning his head back before a screech overhead echoed like daggers off his ears. "Ah, blast! Breaking off!"

Then the Frostwurm showed up. Loud flaps smashed through the air as it soared with an open maw full of sharp, jagged teeth.

Pulling the stick hard to the right, both men in the plane grunted as the biplane spiraled into a barrel roll that avoided talons and tooth by mere inches just as the undead dragon's ice breath splashed the top of a distant craggy mountain, covering it in sharp ice that it landed on, and pounced back up into the air.

"Fel's bells and thrall's balls; warn me when you do that next time!" Wrenchbomb gagged, punching Kili on the shoulder. "We might be dead, but I can still feel my head spinning after that."

"Look, it's either that or we're that monster's lunch, and I'm willing to lose yours not to be his!" Kili yelled back, gritting his teeth as he stared ahead, listening

to the sounds of the wyrm following behind them as it chased them over the eternal snow and ice



Eight years ago, the Fourth War was at the height of its destruction. Azerite was plentiful, and it wreaked havoc across the world as well as in neutral companies and goblin cartels. People were rushing to mine as much as possible, intending to sell it for a high price before the Alliance and Horde stopped it and hoarded it for themselves.

The weaponry made from this was as destructive as it was impressive. However, in order to process and guard it, the Cartels hired mercenary crews to ensure that it didn't fall into anyone else's hands.

In the middle of the hot jungles surrounding Booty Bay, one of the recruiters quietly sat in a booth at the Salty Sailor, spending his day drinking grog, eyeing up the waitresses, and sending missives to his bosses. Just as he was licking the glue on one envelope to send back with the day's reports, a Gnome walked up and smacked the table he was sitting at.

The recruiter eyed him, unimpressed. "Name," he asked plainly, seeing that the gnome was young and eager to get out into the world.

"Kilivon Pulsenozzle," the gnome spoke.

"Age?" the recruiter followed.

"Twenty-nine."

"Purpose for joining the Onyx Daggers roughneck crew?" the recruiter asked, following the same list of questions he asked everyone.

The gnome momentarily hesitated as if to cycle through a list of canned responses he had practiced. "Haven't earned my name yet. I want to prove what I'm worth."

For a second, the recruiter eyed the gnome with that response. He was used to the more usual replies he got. He expected to hear 'money,' 'fame,' 'adventure,' or any number of other tropes he heard from those who bragged and were full of more piss and vinegar than senses.

"Hmm. You willing to work with races usually aligned with the Horde?"

"If you mean goblins, then you don't have to worry. I might be a gnome, but I was actually born here in Booty Bay. Ma's current boyfriend is Marlax Bangfuse of the Steamwheedle," Kili muttered.

The recruiter tried not to smirk and just shook his head. He didn't know who this Marlax guy was, nor did he care, and he doubted he would want to know more as he slid a sheaf of paper written in legalese across the rough booth table towards the man. "Good, good. Read the contract, sign when yer ready, pal."

It was unfortunate for Kili that he lacked a strong sense of understanding bureaucracy or legally binding terms. He was, at heart, much like any other gnome: Brilliant in many ways, liable to skip the little details, which didn't help him when it came to reading through contracts. Not that it mattered, though. He read it, gave it a good skim as his eyes darted across words and meanings he couldn't parse, and then signed his name on the dotted line, praying that he didn't miss anything.

As the recruiter thanked him for signing up, told him to gather his belongings, and licked another envelope, a third man approached the booth, bumping into Kili.

It was his childhood rival and friend, Mylmold Wrenchbomb.

"Find that job you were looking for?" he asked, poking at the signup sheet Kili had.

Kili smirked at him, flapping the paper in his face. "Maybe! Merc work, it looks like. You should sign up, too. Might be able to use your explosives."

Wrenchbomb mulled it over, rolling his jaw slightly as he rubbed his chin. "Merc work, eh? Well, if they need rifles, bombs, mechs, and other goblin goodies, I'll sign up. Why the hell not?" he said, looking at the recruiter and then back at Kili with a growing grin. "Or at least maybe another goblin with goodies if it's cartel-affiliated."

And just like that, both of them found themselves as members of the Onyx Daggers. The start of something to do together that they were sure would lead to amazing adventures. The start-up money was good, too.



The memory instantly left Kili's mind just as the biplane's alarm went off, screaming at him to focus his attention on the now rather than on the past.

"Pull-up, pull-up, pull-up," the monotonous robotic voice chimed over the intercom as the repeated burst of machine gun fire rattled behind Kili. The roar of the Frostwyrm telling him that they were still behind chased.

"Did you get him?" Kili yelled over his shoulder.

Another roar told him no.

"Wrenchbomb, hold on!" Kili yelled again, hoping this time he would get a better answer. He pulled back on the lever, bringing the biplane out of the death plunge toward the ground and straight up into a corkscrew aimed for the sky.

A loud squawk of surprise and the gunfire stopping told Kili that his warning was heard, and Wrenchbomb held on as tightly as he could. His stomach bottomed out, and he watched the Frostwurm banked underneath them as if it intended to fly straight up again.

His grin remained on his undead face, and an idea came to him. He grabbed his bag, and that grin turned malicious as he grabbed several bomb balls from within. As soon as the plane stabilized, he threw them over the side, down towards the Frostwurms' back.

A moment later, the seaforium-packed bomb ball went off, exploding in a plume of shrapnel, bone, and icy scale as it broke the beast's back and sent it spiraling with a surprised screech down to the snow below. Its eyes dimmed as it returned to the death from whence it came till it crashed into the mountain, and an avalanche buried it.

"Bogey down, " Kili muttered, watching over the side of the plane as the wind whipped his face.

"Come on, I saw that smirk from earlier," Wrenchbomb laughed, smacking his friend. "Undeath hasn't been kind to you. I know we haven't got the best hold on our emotions, but you have to use them, or you lose them."

"I'll celebrate once our two-hundred-pound payload is dropped on the target location. We have to slow the dead down so they don't leave Icecrown." Kili replied, growling as he returned to his seat and stared ahead.

Wrenchbomb shrugged and stuffed his bag back beside him. "Right, right. But we can celebrate survivin', right?"

"Neither of us is alive to survive something," Kili said, looking over his shoulder as he angled the plane upward to the sky again.

"Hey. It's not my fault we didn't read the damn fine print on that contract!"

Kili huffed a bit as he looked away, facing out to the endless blue sky above the dreary, overcast clouds that laid like a blanket beneath them. It was true, it wasn't his fault, but it had to have been someone's.



In the Jungles of Zandalar, the two friends were set up and ordered to act as snipers, settled in a spot that overlooked one of the Venture Company's biggest dig sites for Azerite.

"Right, right," see that big guy there?" Wrenchbomb muttered, turning on a pointer so Kili could see.

Kili leaned in, narrowing his eyes to focus better. "I see him. What about him?" Kili muttered, keeping his face glued to the scope. "You know, other than he's a real tall one."

"I've been watching him all morning. I even saw him crush Azerite into his coffee. He's the foreman out here," Wrenchbomb explained, tapping the scope. "We could pop him and throw them all in a panic out there. Might even make it easier to pick the guards off one by one."

"Headshots?" Kili asked, pulling back to look at the goblin.

Wrenchbomb grinned as he usually did and shrugged. "Headshots, with an explosive round to make sure he stays dead. Azerite does weird things to people, so you gotta make sure."

Right," Kili said, smirking as he pulled back on his gun to do just that.

Soon, both loaded in their special rounds made exclusively by Wrenchbomb (as was his specialty) and got into place. Two seconds later, twin fiery flowers blossomed where the Ogre's head was, and they watched as he fell backwards, gurgling while the diggers - both slaves and underpaid employees - scrambled for cover and pocketed what they could. The two snipers continued firing, taking down guard after guard as the employees made a run for the jungle.



"Ah, crap. We got plague hawks at 3 o'clock now!" Kili spoke, moving to stand up as he reached for his flare gun on his hip. "We got any ammo left in that gun?" he asked, firing off a flare.

A second later, the flare exploded in bright, painful light as all the undead (hawks and the pilots alike) shuddered under the hateful glow. Kili hated it, and Wrenchbomb gagged as he shivered and slammed the machine gun back into its nest.

"T-thanks for the warning! But yes, the gun is hot and ready," he yelled as he racked the bullets in and squeezed the trigger, firing into the stunned birds as they fell from the sky. "Die! Die! Die! Die again, you buzzards!"

"Making me anxious to drop these bombs soon," Kili muttered as a gargoyle flew up to intercept them. Its large wings beat against the sky as it sought to rake its claws against the underside of the biplane's hull.

The gnomish man turned, angling the plane away as the gargoyle missed its mark and shot up above. In an instant, Kili replaced a flare into his gun and shot another round straight into the monster's face. The bright, glowing light stunned it, and it fell down to Azeroth to its permanent death.

"Finally," he muttered.

"Finally. Better?" Wrenchbomb asked, breaking back into his grin.

"Yeah. Better," Kili agreed.

"Good. You're not you when you've not satiated the hunger in a while."

Then Kili laughed and knew he was right. He wasn't being his usual self, and he couldn't help but smirk as he returned the plane to where they needed to go.



Back on the shores of Kalimdor, the Horde and Alliance squared up against one another to fight over an emerging vein of Azerite that sprang from the ground. The glowing blue and yellow ore glistened beneath the sun, and battle lines formed to claim it for the other side.

"Ah great," Kili muttered as he looked through his binoculars to the two armies, passing it over to Wrenchbomb beside him.

He took it and peered into it in the indicated direction just as his jaw hit the ground. "What the- is that a damn tank?" he groaned.

"Yep. Two of 'em. The other one went over the hill. Guess they're answering the demolishers that the Horde brought." Kili sighed, scooting down the small trench they had dug for themselves.

"Think we need to tell Jeremy they got war machines out there?" Wrenchbomb asked and slid back down as well, scrabbling across clay and gravel.

Kili tilted his head and thought about it. "We really should. We only have small arms out here. Just some peashooters the dwarves didn't want. No rockets and nothing to make bombs with. All I have is a world en-" he said, but then, goblin and gnome looked at each other and grinned.

"You thinking what I'm thinking?" Wrenchbomb asked.

"I think I am," Kili said, feeling the spark of ingenuity hitting him.

"Strap that bad boy to my sniper rifle then, and let's see what happens."

"One x-treme Gobcannon XL coming your way!" Kili laughed and started to take what he had to build onto his friend's rifle—converting the world enlarger to effect bullet payload instead of the world itself. All as it came out of the barrel. The electrical pulse - in theory, as Kili would later explain it - would affect the bullet as it left the barrel and turned a sniper round into a full-fledged tank buster.

It was ingenious, both men would later say.

"It is missing something, though," Wrenchbomb muttered before an idea came to him. "Ah hah! Needs more explosives."

He cycled through the ammo he had and found the one he needed: The high-caliber one they used in Zandalar not too long ago. The long, sharp round was perfect for his needs, and the brass of the casing shone beneath the light as if it had a heartbeat of its own. Fueled by powdered azerite within.

"Alright, Kili, you're the tank expert. What am I aiming for?"

Kili slowly climbed back up the small trench, thankful for his gnomish size so as to be in the perfect position to snipe. He pointed with his battlefield pointer,

guiding the goblins' aim as he pointed out the parts of the distant steam tank to hit.

"Steam pressure valve left of the cockpit entrance. Might be heavily protected, but if that thing goes up, the whole tank does, too."

Wrenchbomb waited for the right moment and then pulled the trigger. The weapon kicked hard against his shoulder, sending the goblin stumbling back as the shot sped out. The bullet expanded to the size of an artillery shell, accelerated by Azerite blast powder.

"Holy hell," Kili muttered as he watched the shell continue to grow and then slam into the tank. Once it hit the tank, it exploded. The enlarger did its job and did it well. The growth affected the explosive Azerite tip, increasing the payload just as the vein popped out of the earth. It was a chain reaction as azerite arms and armor went up, creating a temporary second sun on the horizon.

The world shook wildly beneath their feet, and the second sun soon dimmed to a plume of smoke in the distance. A crater now deep within the world as the armies scattered away from the ruined vein. Gravel, rocks, metal, and more shot out from where the explosion landed, and Kali laughed as he leaped up from his trench to cheer at the destruction they had wrought.

"Hah! Look at that Wrenchbomb! It worked!" he whooped, turning his head to grin at his friend, though it faltered on his face when he saw the state of the goblin beside him.

He laid there among a puddle of blood. Eyes fixated on the sky above as a dark piece of steel shunted out of his chest at a grotesque angle. He was silent.

"Wrenchbomb?" he said again, more worried than before, as he knelt in the dust to check on the goblin. He was silent still. His mouth was wide open as if he was prepared to whoop, cheer, and holler as well.

"Wrenchbomb..." Kali then said. However, he had little time to mourn. Another explosion ripped in the distance, another tank behind a hill they missed exploded, and then, as soon as he bent over his friend, Kali's world darkened while another round of shrapnel peppered him from behind. Both men bled out on that battlefield, right next to one another.



"Alright, bogey's are all down," Kali said, looking over his shoulder again as Wrenchbomb gave a thumbs up and a grin.

"Nice shootin' Kali," he called out from his seat with a laugh. "How much gas do we have left in this thing?"

Kali looked at the gauge and quickly did the math in his head while the wind whistled around them and froze the tips of his black mustache. "Eh, we've got enough. We'll bring her down at the tournament grounds and hoof it back to Shadow Vault. Between the machine gun, your bombs, and our rune weapons, we should be alright."

"Good. We're close then?"

"Yup. We're dropping the payload in an old argent path they carved years ago when they breached Icecrown."

Wrenchbomb laughed again. "Oh, I remember that path. Lemme know when we're there! I'm all tense and excited now!"

"Alright! T-minus ten... nine... eight..."



Eight was the number of shards pulled out of Kali's back. The gnome remembered his death and returned to the mortal world atop a rusty table while a human necromancer tugged each piece out with a pair of pliers. The room was dark and smelled foul.

"Sir, what happened to these two?" The necromancer - a woman with long stringy hair that covered her face beneath her hood - asked.

A man with a strong jawline and serious eyes sat in a chair on the other side of the room. Shadows formed over his face from the waning light that filtered above. He sat with his palms between his knees, staring directly at Kali as he laid there unmoving, unfeeling, but partially back to consciousness.

"From what the reports said, they modified their weaponry to destroy a tank."

"I see. And did it work?" she asked, plucking another jagged shard of shrapnel, and dropping it onto the floor with a loud clunk.

"Yeah. They blew everything up in the process. Survivors from the explosion initially thought they belonged to the other faction and did not claim them. It worked out for us since we got them back. Would have hated for them to get out of their contracts otherwise."

The necromancer responded with a slight tilt of her head and reached out for another set of tools: Long thin metal instruments meant for poking, prodding, and sealing the dead, as well as pulsating crystals of dark energy within. The room hummed sickly as she reached for them, darkening Kali's vision slightly.

"Surprised they accepted that part of the contract. Guess the hazard pay was too good to pass up," she said but tittered lightly. "Well, this is half the fun. Getting them into raising condition. I'll work quickly for you, Mister Jeremy. I just need to set them right."

Then, she reached down and snapped Kali's neck as his head twisted back around, and everything went black again. His last thoughts were how he wished he had read that fine print after all and went over the contract once more.



"-three.... two...."



Kali gasped as he sat back up again, returning to the conscious world once more. He was alive and sitting on that table once more. A cool chill washed over him from an unseen wind, but he didn't shiver or feel its coldness over him.

His mind raced, trying to remember the last things he saw. Had it all been a dream? Wrenchbomb died, there was a necromancer, Mister Jeremy was talking, and he was on a table... Was it more of a nightmare than anything?

Just as he started to question his memories, Wrenchbomb groaned in the darkness, lying beneath a sheet on a table beside him just out of view.

"Hey, whose bright idea was it to turn off the lights?" he groaned, sitting up as he pulled the sheet off his face and rubbed his jaw. Then he turned where he sat, staring at Kali with bright, glowing eyes that shimmered with an inner fire in the darkness, wisping tendrils of smoke that dissipated inches from his face.

He blinked and pointed at Kali, confused.

"Woah woah woah, who's the Death Knight, and why do you look like my friend?" he gasped.

"Get off it, Wrenchbomb, it's me! What are you talking about? What happened to your eyes?" Kali said back.

"Mine? Yours looks like... okay, what's happening?" Wrenchbomb went to ask, but then a clap silenced them as they jumped and looked at the room's entrance.

Standing in the doorway, blocked by the shadows of the hallway behind him, stood Mister Jeremy. No longer sitting, he was standing in simple nobleman's attire that was free of wrinkles. His face was stern, but the slight upturn of his lips showed some slight mirth.

"Gentlemen, it's good to see you awake. To answer both of your questions, you've been risen. You really should have read the fine print," he said, handing each of them a copy of the contracts they had signed years ago.

"Oh, fel...Kali, we signed death contracts!" Wrenchbomb muttered, grabbing the contract and quickly reading through it as the white pupils in his glowing eyes skimmed across the paper.

Kali blinked, confused. "Death, what?"

"Death contract," Mister Jeremy said. "It means that upon your deaths, your bodies are to be raised and then given to the Ebon Blade. A sort of deal we've struck with them to keep their numbers up, so to say," he said, waving his hand. "But that's not the point. Welcome to your new life, gentlemen. You'll be doing double duty with both now that you'll find you no longer need to sleep or eat."

From there, they were transferred to their new life, and within days, they were fitted in Saronite Armor and pushed through their new training.



"One..." Kali yelled, and then grabbed at a third lever to the side, pulling it back just as the doors beneath the biplane opened up. A whistle signified that they had dropped their payload. Banking hard to the left, the plane grew lighter and lighter with each bomb that fell.

Wrenchbomb sat up to lean over the plane's side and watched it all fall to the ground. With a flask in his hand, he opened the engine's gas tank and poured the entirety of the ethanol inside to give their plane a few more miles.

The explosions followed a few moments later, echoing dully into the air.

"Yeah, baby! Look at that fire!" Wrenchbomb yelled with a laugh. Watching as snow and heavy wooden support beams that rotted and wasted with age and ice crumbled down atop the meandering dead, crushing them beneath tons of rubble, rock, and fire. It sealed the path, protecting the argents who would no doubt use the area again in the future.

Both men cackled as they turned the plane and aimed it back at the old Argent Tournament Grounds. Glad that they had some flat land to land on without the risk of exploding, burning, or dying again.

"Our best run yet," Wrenchbomb said, raising his fist to bump.

Kali chuckled and met him knuckle to knuckle. "So far. For now, we'll land in the jousting field, take the machine gun, and fight back to the shadow vaults. The Te'kill'u is on me tonight."

It sounded like a plan to them both. As soon as they landed not too long ago, the two set to work, taking what gear they could with them. Machine gun fire, rune weapons, bombs, and moxie.

The grounds were empty and devoid of life at this time of year. Not a soul spoke save for the whispers that hid beneath the winds and spoke of the heartaches and hell that had corrupted these lands. Kali lifted his head, letting the biting chill sweep across his dark black mustache and beard, unshivering as he felt the pressure but not its effects. It was funny to him how beautiful it all looked now that he didn't have to worry about surviving the glacial wasteland.

They'd make their way back. They always did. For them, it was another day in the Ebon Blade. Though both men now knew to read the fine print of anything they signed from here on out.

**THE END**

# The Locket

Written by Alnarra



**The druidess looked down at the small wooden locket** that hung around her neck, holding it in her hand as she rubbed her thumb against the wood grain.

The small coffin-shaped object had virtually become a part of her at this point. The leather was well-maintained and pristine, while the wood was oiled and gleaming. It was one of the few objects Alnarra was careful to clean every morning and the one object she never wanted to lose.

As she opened it and stared at the picture behind the thin glass, her mind fondly drifted to the day she got it.

It was a chilly spring morning. She could still recall how her youngest complained that a trip to Hyjal was silly because they had some school-related event they wanted to attend instead. Alnarra had been insistent. Trips to the capital of their people weren't unheard of, but it wasn't often that the entire family had time to take a trip somewhere together. Rumbblings in the south spoke of collapsed quilboar tunnels and angered silithid dens, and the news had already made its way through the cities and towns of the Kaldorei.

She knew her two oldest had already been requested by the sentinels and circle alike to prepare to move out in the next few months. She was uncertain of the next time she would have all of them together in one place.

So, she decided to commission an artist in Hyjal to paint the whole family together—a family photo that she could keep on the mantle, as any proud parent would.

Kissing her mate's cheek, the five Kaldorei used some of the sabers they raised on their farm to make their way through Northern Ashenvale - a place in modern times called the Felwood. Then, it was just as bright and filled with life as Ashenvale was, so close to Hyjal's base.

At that time of year, the flowers were starting to bloom, and the animals had emerged from their dens as the winter months drew to a close.

It was a trip they were familiar with. Traveling to Hyjal wasn't anything new or grand, as they frequently visited to buy or sell goods at the market or to ensure that necessary paperwork was taken care of. Alnarra had been there last week to pick up a bundle of herbs to help soothe the stomach of a few ill sabers.

But it was different this time. There was no talk of trade, sick kitties, or anything related to their farm. Just a family of elves catching up with one another and enjoying each other's company.

Talgath, her oldest son, explained how excited he was to begin learning healing magics from his Shan'do. He was like his mother in that regard. Like her, he had gone before the circle to learn about druidism and studied to become a doctor. He had even set up his own clinic in the hills of Azshara.

Myrodin, her middle child, had spent some time with Kaldorei sentinels to help learn how to create scouting notes effectively and relay information back to Command.

Alannah, her youngest, was soon to graduate from the academy in Ashenvale to pursue her own interests. Alnarra had hoped she might have chosen a little rebellion against the status quo and looked into druidism as she had, though her father, Veralden, had encouraged her to use her skills as a huntress with the sentinels.

For every inch of frustration that came with raising a child, there were boundless moments of joy that followed. Much like then, where she could see all three of her children, and her mate trek through the quiet hillside to the shores of the lake that nestled by the great world tree Nordrassil.

The druidess could still remember the scent in the air—the smell of wildflowers, grass, and the sweetness of ferns. Lovely and aromatic, it was like a garden that calmed her mind when she was there. The artist asked the five to sit together on a small bench. Alnarra remembered trying to help her middle child get his hair into the ponytail he wanted. Pulling out a small strip of cloth, she wiped away some pollen from her mate's cheeks and tried to make them all look as professional as possible.

After all, getting such pictures was not easy, unlike in modern times, with the prevalence of selfie cams everywhere. The artists were often booked months, if not years, in advance and frequently backlogged with commissions. Getting a spot in the queue was a tedious effort on the best of days. Yet, her patience had paid off, and she was ever thankful that they had secured their spot in the queue just before her children were called away to the destinies that awaited them.

They sat for what felt like hours, holding their pose as the artist worked diligently to capture every feature and nuanced detail. When they finally finished, and the family gathered around to look at the work on display, it was apparent that the wait had been well worth it. Its details were almost realistic, down to every wrinkle and smile. Perhaps some arcane magic had been used to help liven the poses, but that was a secret best unshared.

Alnarra treasured the picture the moment it was made. She ensured that copies were made so that she could place them in picture frames and give a copy to her children before they left. Little did she know at the time that beneath the boughs of Nordrassil on that day, it would be the last time all five of them would be together and happy.

In the coming months, an event known as the War of the Shifting Sands would start. Alnarra's children would all do their sworn duty to protect the Kaldorei people, marching off to war. She and her husband remained behind to provide the sentinels and circle with sabers for the war effort, only to receive word that the lives of all three of her children had been claimed at the attack of the Kaldorei base of operations at Southside Village.

Thousands of years later, during the cataclysm, she could only watch in horror and sadness as Alliance troops dragged her away to safety while her mate fought one desperate battle to ensure that they all escaped a cultist encampment in the Twilight Highlands.

Now, this image encased in a coffin-shaped locket was all that she had left of that prior life—a reminder of a different time she could no longer go back to. Over the years, she eventually came to terms with a life without her children or mate, but some days were harder than others.

It wasn't possible for her to escape the past that intertwined itself with her life, nor to push down and bury what had happened. But the little locket did help her for a moment regain a sense of calm and composure when those moments and bottled emotions bubbled to the surface.

This locket reminded her of all the wonderful moments, of all the happiness and sorrows that come with raising a family. It helped keep her grounded and reminded her of what she was fighting for in times when she forgot. During the third legion invasion, when she was helping with Section 28's operations, she would often turn to the locket, asking the family that she had lost what she should do, what was right, and what she might have forgotten.

Her finger gently caressed the glass frame that kept the picture behind safe from the elements and ravages of time, a single tear running down her cheek even as a smile danced across her face. Taking a deep breath, she closed the little locket again, stepping back into the role she played now, which was different from before but not so far from where she had been. So long as she kept that little reminder of her past close, she was never far from those that she loved, and they were never far from her.

The End

The Locket | Submitted by Alnarra | Drawn by NP4tch



# SOUL OF THE MOUNTAIN

## PART I — STRIPS OF BARE ROCK

Written by Rease Stoneheart



***Author Note:** This is Part 1 of a serialized story that will be played out in subsequent Issues of the Warcraft Fanzine.*

**Stonetalon was beautiful in a way that was almost incomprehensible to the small vulperan woman.** Compared to the surrounding areas of Kalimdor (minus Mulgor), it was hospitable and welcoming. The Barrens were hot and endlessly boring, while Ashenvale was far too dark and hostile with ancient magics that ran deep into the earth. Desolace was... desolate, and felt like a part of Azeroth that was ruined beyond repair.

Yet, here in the mountains, the sky was an endless azure that welcomed Kiwo's gaze, and the woods were vast yet serene. The smell of oak and birch filled her lungs with each breath, and birds of all types tittered and chirped around her. The paths in the hilly landscape had been roughly stamped by generations of

tauren, and their rocky roads were easy on her and her bakar companion's bare paws.

Kiwo couldn't help but enjoy the chilliness in the air as the wind swept through her soft, ragged fur. The way the cold swept beneath her undercoat and pooled along the dips of her armor was a welcomed relief from the heat of travel, even though Odie was doing most of the legwork in carrying her up into the mountains.

Despite herself, she grinned a little bit, closing her eyes for a minute as she leaned back in the makeshift saddle to enjoy the sensations for a moment longer before she shifted and patted the back of Odie's neck.

"Pretty good day for a hike, wouldn't you say?" she said, running her long fingers through his copper-red fur.

"Boof!" Odie replied, barking happily as his floppy ears perked to the question.

Kiwo smirked and scratched an ear before she sat back and relaxed again. "Thought you'd like it. Just have to get through this mountain first, though."

Where they were going, even Kiwo didn't know. All she knew was that she needed to get away for a little while and hit the road to find some work somewhere, or at least explore Azeroth a little more. Having worked herself to the bone, offering her services as a Monster Hunter to the Argent Crusade over the last several years, she felt that her work was more or less done. Plus, she had a family to think about now and didn't want to be carted off to various undead battlefields anymore.

The gold was nice, but it was time to move on. The work she did soothed the sins of her soul, but when her contract was done she left the Plaguelands and

traveled across the sea to Kalimdor. Now free to pursue the contracts that she wanted to pursue.

What was she looking for out here? Work mainly. Her bank account had a new hefty nest egg, but even she knew that was a bad day away from being squandered for something else. What use was there in resting on her laurels, growing fat and slow when there was a vast world to explore and many who needed what she knew and could do?

Stonetalon was a nice enough place to find it. The Horde controlled most of the mountain, and the Tauren knew their hunting craft well. She could even pick up a thing or two from them if she kept her large ears perked to their lessons.

Plus, there was something comforting about the tall trees and the thick foliage surrounding her, even on this mountainous, rocky path. The smell of evergreen hung thickly in the air while the canopy of tall redwoods and sequoias kept the sun from baking the rocky, moss-covered grass beneath. Even the pollen of wildflower fields tickled her muzzle and covered her in a pleasant aroma.

For all its beauty, it was the perfect place for monsters and other nasties to hide. No matter how serene it looked during the day, every beautiful spot housed something evil at night. For Kiwo, that was precisely what she was after. Every time she and Odie passed beneath a particularly dense part of the trail, she idly let her fingers rub at the crossbow slung across her back while her eyes furtively darted into the shadows.

As she and Odie crested a hill, the scenery changed instantly. The higher they traveled beneath the summit's gaze, the more she expected the same: trees, flowers, and waterfalls. Yet at the top of this small rise, she saw a wide expanse of emptiness that ran for miles.

An almost emptiness, to be precise: Tree stumps were all that remained sticking out of the ground, standing two to three feet from the ground amidst a series of tread tracks and torn canvas tents. Ponds that once would have housed fish, crawdads, and more - fed from nearby streams and creeks - were brackish and dirty, and any other signs of life from animals to flora were gone.

The wind howled emptily. A once gentle, cold breeze, now laden with dust and dirt and full of icy air, buffeted her and Odie as it nearly blustered the large dog off his feet.

"Yikes. I wonder what happened here," Kiwo muttered to herself, slowly swinging her leg over Odie's back as she landed upon bare, pawed feet on the hard-packed path. "It's like something just took all the trees in one go."

"Boof!" Odie replied, pinning his ears to the back of his canid head.

Kiwo rolled her eyes. "I know it's lumberjacks, you goof. I'm not dumb. It's just... that's a lot of trees to take, and I doubt the Tauren would like that," she replied, sweeping her hand behind her to make her point.

Odie just panted, and she took that as a sign that their argument was over. She slid down a small, dusty ditch towards the edge of the clearing, noting how even the topsoil had been stripped clean. There was no moss, bed of wet rotting leaves, or spindly grass reaching for what little sunlight would have reached the ground had the trees remained.

Slinging off her crossbow, she wandered to the tread tracks and knelt, running her fingers along the dried mud as the outline of the treads crumbled to the slightest touch. The air was foul, with the smell of grease and stale gasoline—the sweetness of the forest replaced by industry.

Odie watched her. No longer panting as his bright orange eyes swept over the barren land with his ears swiveling to the woods behind them.

It didn't take long for her to assess that there was no danger here. However, the sudden quietness was unsettling. Even the barrens, renowned for their vast expanse of dry, cracked earth, teemed with buzzing insects and the occasional animal scurrying around. Here, there was nothing as if no life wanted to traverse what had taken a gouge out of the mountainside.

"Well, if there is any danger here, it's long gone, or not interested," Kiwo said, climbing up the small ditch and remounting atop Odie. "No reason to hang around here when we have miles still and only a set amount of daylight."

"Boof," Odie agreed with another bark, waiting for her heels to click against his armored side before he walked, carrying her onward.

A part of her felt that something was wrong out here, but she couldn't pinpoint what it was. Aside from the lack of trees, there was a weirdness in the air that squeezed into the pit of her stomach, and she pushed Odie on faster to get away, not wanting to be there longer than she needed to be.

Eventually, the swath of earth crawled back to the mountain's familiar forests, for which Kiwo was thankful. She was used to wide open spaces, having spent six years in Vol'dun, and then in other wide open places around the world. Though the sudden appearance of nothingness when she enjoyed somethingness set off her nerves and frazzled her fur.

As they traveled further into the mountains, the sheer rock faces heaved out of the earth, creating large walls around them.

Soon, they came to a sign on the road, pointing in several directions to other towns and outposts of the Horde in the area. One pointed towards the rocky, craggy cliff face, with the sign reading:

*"Star Cliff Outpost"*

Kiwo pulled back on Odie's harness to stop him. Her ears flicked as she looked overhead towards the dipping sun and realized it might be best to stop for a while.

"Well, we are running low on supplies, and it is getting closer to night than I'd like," she reasoned, dragging the tip of her claw through the cream fur of her chin.

It was decided, and she guided Odie to turn, heading through the cliff face.

Thankfully for both her and Odie, it was wide enough for them to traverse easily through. Wide enough even for four Orcs to walk hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder if they desired. A dozen yards later, they were through, staring out into a wide basin that dipped around a circle of mountainous hills with a small encampment of Shu'halo tents, makeshift wooden lodges, and a hub of activity.

There weren't any walls to protect the outpost - what reason would there be with the craggy bluffs all around - so Kiwo dismounted off of Odie and took his thick leash in hand as she walked to the edge of the camp, and on in.

People of all races of the Horde were here: Tauren, Orc, goblins, and even a few elves were casually mulling around tents and campfires, talking and laughing among one another. The smell of burning wood and meat hung heavily in the air

with a mix of smokiness and sweetness that was enough to make Kiwo's belly rumble as she entered the friendly camp.

"Hail, Vulpera. Are you here to hunt as well?" A large Tauren man with brown shaggy fur called out to Kiwo. His horns rolled back along his broad head, buried beneath a wild mane full of flowers and beads. A slight smile pulled at his lips, and he sat amongst several others, sharpening their weapons.

"Oh, passing through, really," Kiwo said, shaking her head. "Saw the sign and thought I'd come and do a bit of trading. Maybe even find some work for some gold."

"Ah, trading we can do," The Tauren replied, waving her and Odie over. "Work? Well, besides maybe some odd jobs for some food, I doubt you'll find much here for gold. Everyone here only brought what was needed to hunt."

"Oh, well damn," Kiwo replied, ears falling atop of her head. "But hey, trading is good enough. Shame about the work."

One of the others in the group - an elven man with long blond hair and a thin, pinched face - looked up from sharpening his spear and chuckled. "If you want work, you can always go to the Venture Company. Bastards are always looking for people."

Kiwo tilted her head at the slightly familiar name. "Heard of them. Aren't they some goblin group or something? Heard they tend to strip mine wherever they go till nothings left."

The Tauren man pursed his lips but kept his amiable nature as a hot breath puffed from his wide nostrils. "Yes, that's them, and they've been here for years. Far longer than I would have liked them to be."

The others tensed up and continued their work, though Kiwo pressed on. She knew enough about the goblins to know that even amongst the ones who sided with the Horde, they had a reputation that was less than favorable. She cautiously worded what she thought to say as diplomatically as she could. A trait she learned while in the Argent's service.

"Are they the ones that chopped down all the trees on my way in?"

The Tauren just gravely nodded. The others of the hunting group murmured as all the earlier joviality lessened, wafting off them as smoothly as smoke from a fire.

"Well, I doubt I'd find the type of work I'd want with them. I'm a huntress, I scout, and I fight monsters. I'm no lumberjack. Chopping down trees for payment isn't something I'm interested in," Kiwo replied, patting Odie's head as she turned to his haunches and the packs he had.

"Well, yer in luck then, since they got all kinds of trouble last I heard," a short goblin man with stringy black hair said, peering up at Kiwo as he thumbed his hooked nose. "Venture company been plagued with people goin' missing or gettin' killed. Mangled corpses and stuff. Plus, shredding equipment and other tools are gettin' destroyed, and no one knows who is doing it."

Then he looked around himself and gulped. "I mean, look, I got a cousin out there, alright? Even if it's in your line of work, pal, Venture company ain't worth it. Their pay is crap, and even if your heart is in the right place, they'll copper and silver you with fees just for helping."

Another murmur of agreement went amongst the group.

Kiwo debated whether it was worth visiting them and offering help or not. So many people seemingly didn't like them, and was it worth it to help a group of

people who were reviled as such? She knew what the Argent Crusaders would have chosen since they were gluttons to put themselves in harm's way for the less desirable for little more than a pat on the head. By contrast, she was more pragmatic. Praise was good, but pay was gooder, and as she fumbled for things to trade, she saw that her funds were far too low. Her nest egg was secure in a vault, but it did little good in the middle of nowhere.

For tonight, she'd debate whether or not she wanted to help as she mingled back amongst the group with a feigned smile on her foxish face, and made merry with the hunters. Trading tales of courage and valor, as well as small items she could part with for food, hardtack, fresh water, and bolts for her crossbow.

She had no tent, but with a large, fluffy bakar hound whose fur was as warm as his fire breath, she didn't need it while next to the bonfire that the hunters kept going all night. They shared in drink and hunting spoils in exchange for her adventures in the Eastern Kingdoms, and she gladly embellished what she could for spiced roast meat.

And then, when sleep finally came, her last thoughts were of the comforts of the woods and the camaraderie of a camp full of people. Something she didn't feel comfortable in often.



The next day arrived sooner than she had wished. The sun crested high over the lip of a distant summit, bringing warmth and brightness that washed over her vulpine face.

At first, she fought against it, wanting to rest just a bit more before the dawn moved to the afternoon. Odie had other plans, and before she could slink back to the realm of dreams, she felt his long, broad tongue lapping across her face, waterboarding her mid-snore.

"Ack! Pbth! Okie, I'm up, I'm up!" she protested, swinging her hands and catching him by the nose before he could get her again.

She awoke, rubbed her eyes, and looked around her. The hunter friends she had made were gone, but their camping equipment was left behind. Only a few small wooden buildings and lodges were left, with people lingering around—mostly guards and permanent residents who maintained the area.

Eventually, she got up and geared up. There was no sense in staying behind when she needed to move on. Packing up her bedroll, the supplies she traded for, and several of Odie's toys and chewables, she debated whether she genuinely wanted to go where the Venture Company was located.

She heeded the warnings, but the lack of gold in her pack made it more enticing. If anything, she reasoned, she could at least hear their price and decide on the spot. So she asked several guards where they were, and they told her they had gone deep into the mountains, 'where the best trees were.'

When pressed, they just said, "North. You'll see a waterfall below the clouds."

With that information, she hopped atop Odie after feeding him a quick breakfast and guided him out from within the basin, through the path in the cliffs, and then back to the hiking trail, where she stopped, turned to see the sun's position, pulled out a compass, and went northward into the deeper parts of the mountain.

Off the trail, the woods got denser. The redwoods grew wider and taller, and the bushes, vines, and other vegetation grew thicker as twisted, thorny weeds clung to the gnarled roots of the giant trees. The travel was easy despite taking her most of the day to complete. Large moose and elk warily stared at her and her bakar companion as they walked on, and she, in turn, stared back with her ears perked up. Prey that they were, they could still cause damage if threatened, and she wanted to keep her distance. At least she was thankful that nothing in the mountain wanted to challenge the large, fire-breathing bakar dog.

Though the further she went, the bolder the beasts of the great forest were. They didn't run from her, and she could swear that she felt eyes in the woods watching her. Whenever she turned from the compass to look around her, something darted behind the great trunks or flitted away in the eaves above her.

"Just my nerves. It's probably just birds or something," she told herself, even as the fur prickled along her spine and bristled her tail.

Once more, she and Odie crested a gently sloping hill, reaching the top again before she stared down into a nearly empty valley.

Another logging scene, just like before. Large tree stumps a foot or two off the ground were all she could see for miles, leading further down to a basin at the foot of a large lake nestled by a sheer, mountainous cliffside with a roaring waterfall. The water that fell was clean and pristine, but the water at the lake was dirty and rainbowed with chemicals. Unlike before, mechanical shredders were busily sawing; people were moving back and forth between makeshift buildings and tents, and large wagons pulled by kodos held logs ready to be distributed. Kiwo could hear the sounds of industry echoing off the mountain walls.

"Guess we found where we needed to go, huh?" she asked Odie, reaching out to the quiet bakar as she stroked his head.

He whimpered slightly, and even she could sense that something was wrong. Yet they went, walking down between the tree stumps as the earth - once loamy and spongy - quickly dried and turned to dust beneath their paws.

She made her way to the outer edge of the logging camp. Goblin workers with hard hats and vests stopped and silently watched her go. A shredder with revving engines nearly stepped on her twice, and she angrily yelled. Three times, she and Odie almost got plowed with a log from some inattentive crane operator, causing her to yell again angrily.

Yet she survived and made her way to a small makeshift cabin on rusted metal stilts above the polluted lake's shoreline. The stairs leading up were rickety and carelessly assembled, and Kiwo wondered if they would hold her weight, let alone Odie's.

Debating, she hopped off him and carefully led the shaking beast up as he stared with wide eyes around him. His gargantuan paws cracked the flattened metal beneath him before they made their way up the floor and a half to the front of the office.

The cabin, made of wood, stood out among the other metal equipment covering the landscape. For a second, Kiwo breathed in deeply, smelling the fumes of gas and grease among stale sap and dust, and then reached out to knock on the door.

She'd hear what they had to offer first, she told herself. That's all she was here for. How bad could it be?

**END OF PART I**



**SCREENSHOTS GALLERY**

Blizkibax Blightwick | Submitted by Ruhredion Nightstone



Epic Wipe | Submitted by Elloa



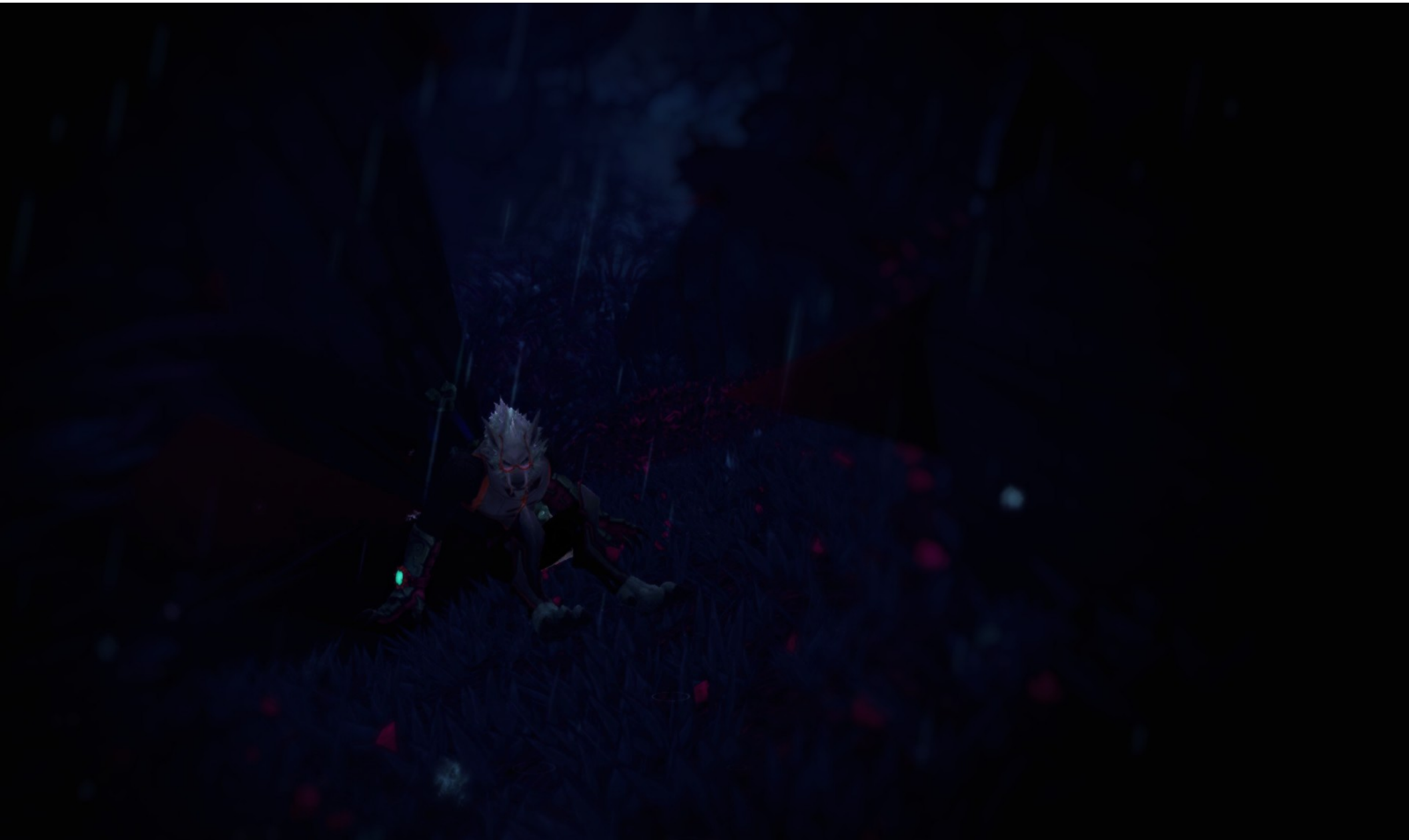
Gallagio View | Submitted by Wraith





PUNK AS HELL — SUBMITTED BY VIXELDA

Lost In The Woods | Submitted by Rease Stoneheart



The Highlife | Submitted by Wraith



Paw prints, Side by Side

Submitted by Vixelda



View of Poverty | Submitted by Hydra



**Waiting At The Incontinental | Submitted by Vixelda**

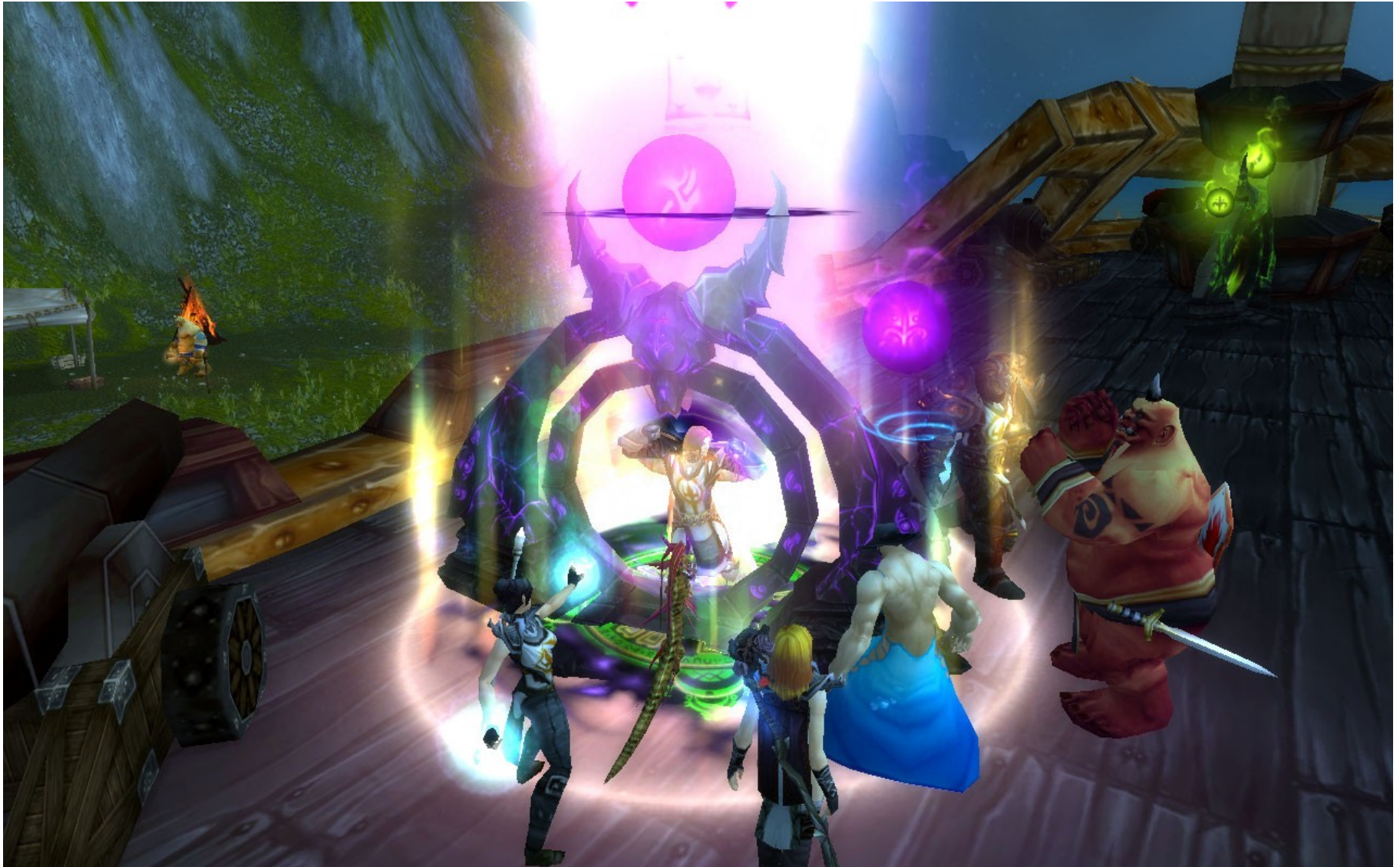


Waiting In Line | Submitted by Hydra



# SUPERSTAR!

Submitted by Rease Stoneheart



Trouble Waiting For Trouble | Submitted by Vixelda



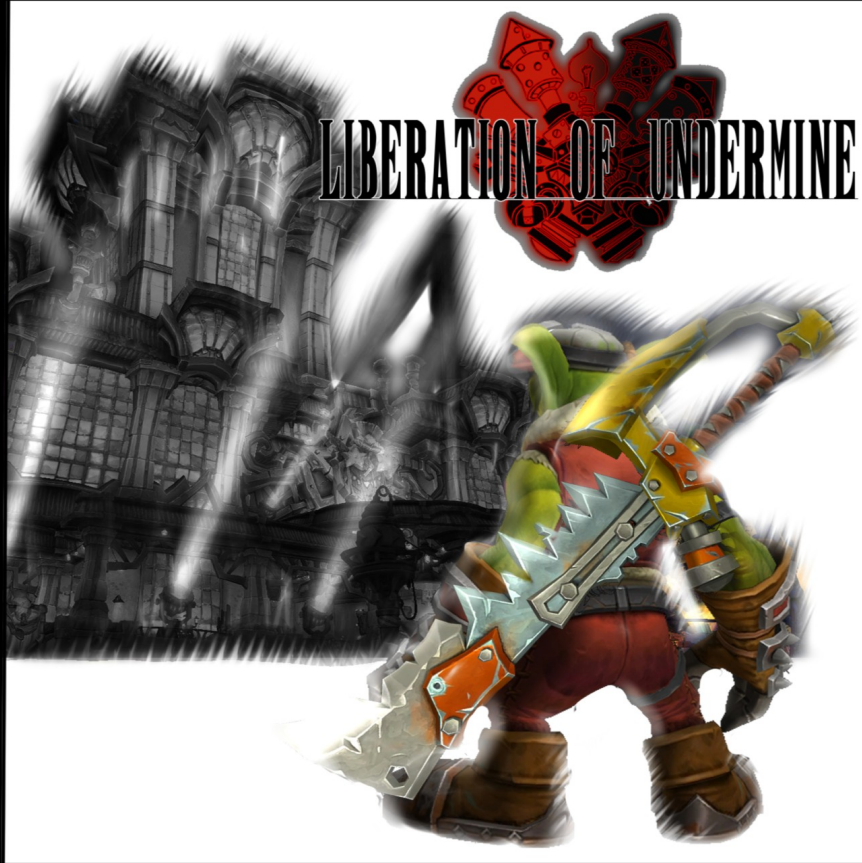
# OWN THE LEGENDARY PATCH FROM THE HIT MMORPG "WORLD OF WARCRAFT"



PlayStation



AGES 13+  
BF-0315  
2025



"Quite possibly, a pretty good patch."  
~WoWfan Weekly

An epic adventure across an entirely new zone

What begins as a rebellion against Gallywix becomes... well just that.

With garbage as far as the eye can see, Blizzards new Goblin zone is an Rpers dream.

"Towers over the competition in terms of not being a buggy mess at launch."  
~ Some guy online



Blizzard Entertainment  
Some address 555 Boulevard California (I think)  
Somewhere in the United States

Copyright stuff goes here. Don't know what to put. All rights reserved. Please think this is funny. I spent so much time on this. Blizzard Co. LLC. LDI. MD.

Please keep in mind this is a parody of FF7's boxart. Honestly Wraith did a great job with the first image that I could't pass up the opportunity to do this justice since it's my favorite RPG. Both Warcraft and Final Fantasy. I SHOULD PROBABLY TYPE IN ALL CAPS FOR THIS SECTION BECAUSE IT WAS WRITTEN IN ALL CAPS ON THE BACK COVER OF THE BOX.



ACTIVISION  
BLIZZARD

TEEN

Realistic Violence, which is totally rad.

For more information about this product, just play the game. Or please call 1-800-Not-A-Real-Number Pal

# CREDITS



There are many people we need to thank in this issue because, without the following, none of this would be possible. A lot of talented people put time, energy, and creativity towards this project, and every issue that's come out has been better than the last.

So, all of them—artists, writers, screenshoters, commissioners, and other contributors—should be celebrated. Nothing is more punk than helping out a community and cheering your fellows on, after all!

Here's to all of you below! You guys kick ass, and I'll see you in Azeroth!

## ALNARRA — WRITER

**Alnarra** is a roleplayer in the Warcraft community for upwards of 15 years, having spent time in various guilds and organizations. They are a Cybersecurity Specialist by trade and can often be spotted on their singular druid, Alnarra-Moon Guard during their off hours. If you're interested in learning more about the wily druidess you can see it all at <https://alnarrarp.blogspot.com/>

## ANGELLA RIDDER — WRITER

**Angela Ridder** is a non-binary writer and programmer who likes to claim that they do nothing more than scribble nonsense across the internet (I do!). They have a long history of roleplay in the World of Warcraft community, originally on Argent Dawn (EU) and since 2018 on Moon Guard (US). Angela started writing fan fiction in 2016. They are currently working on their first novel. You can find out more about them at <https://angelaridder.com/>

## ASSIAR — WRITER

**Assiar** has been a dedicated World of Warcraft role-player for almost ten years now. She has been an original Moon Guard enthusiast since joining the game. Many hours have been dedicated to her craft of writing and creating. Now more focused on game content, her writing has slowed but still burns a deep passion in her soul and will always hold a big piece of her heart. Assiar's player is lovingly devoted to her husband and family, which keeps her busy along with working out of the home. No matter how long gone, she always finds a way back to her favorite video game.

## CROSSWORLDS — ARTIST

**Crossworlds** is a layout artist and is happy to contribute. They currently actively RP on Moon Guard and enjoy drawing, music, and the occasional RP shenanigans. For commissions, please see <https://crossworldsart.carrd.co/>

## **DBSILVERDRAGON — WRITER**

Known to most simply as **Silver**. When not exploring the wilds of Azeroth or Valheim, I can be found sitting in front of a keyboard retelling the adventures of my characters, or even in front of my art tablet, doodling away as I learn. You can find me at [DBSilverdragon on X](#) or [DBSilverdragon on Bluesky](#)

## **DOMARK CORVICOLLIS — WRITER**

**Domark Corvicollis** is but a humble necromancer within Duskwood, typing away on his gnomish typesetter as he reads over action reports and motions, pushing for rights of the undead within the Kingdom of Stormwind, trying to soothe over some of the damage he caused many poor souls in his life. He and his many cats have their door open to the sapient undead who require aid and/or a gentle ear, and you may find him every final Monday holding a retreat in the town of Kharazhan for the dead, and those brave enough among the living, to discuss the fates life so put unto them.

## **ELLOA — SCREENSHOTS**

**Elloa** is a veteran World Of Warcraft player and a [Twitch](#) & [YouTube](#) content creator with 12 years experience. Dreamer, humanist and ecologist, she welcomes everyone and plants trees with her community. Proud member of [Starship \(WOW community\)](#)

## ELUVIANNA — WRITER

**Eluvianna** is an artist, writer, pin designer, Oasis community lead, roleplayer, and Void Elf VTuber. She loves dark fantasy, badass line art, Eldritch horror, and tragic stories. She frequently shares her process and collaborates with folks who appreciate the comfy side of chaos. Her current project, Umbral is all about the origins of her void elf character that started everything she's working on. |

<https://elu.art/>

## EMMA STUDIOS — ARTIST

**Emma** has been an intermediate Rper who started playing World of Warcraft during the pre-launch of Legion and has been a part of the Moon Guard community ever since. She's enjoyed exploring different mediums, from drawing cartoons and art dolls to painting dinosaurs, puffles, comic strips, figure drawing, abstract painting, and finally, writing. Currently, she's still working on her first novel called Ghosts of Brightwater. You can find her artwork at <https://emmaschuler.com/> if you're curious!

## HARUTHO OXENHEAD — WRITER

**Harutho Oxenhead** (Haru) has been roleplaying in many forms for years. He started on Moon Guard for 8 years. He's run and played in games with D&D, WoD, ROOT, and a created system by a friend over the years, and loves doing it so much, it's part of his job. He's written much, having worked on his colligate literary magazine and has completed NaNoWriMo. When not creating stories, he loves to play WoW and cross stitch with his wife. You can find him on X as [@oxenhead](#) and [@haruoxenhead](#) on BlueSky or at community events in game (as Se'tak or Harutho - mostly)

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## **HOLN — AKA A LOTTA PPL — CONTRIBUTOR**

**Holn, AKA "A Lotta People,"** is an avid WoW Rper who spends their time bouncing between the content and roleplay side of Moonguard. They have been roleplaying in Warcraft for seven years and are passionate about storytelling and crafting characters with varied personalities. It's often joked that they're roughly 60% of the Horde population, with some believing that to be true. Currently, they're preparing for the next Warcraft expansion and trying to figure out how to level their army of alts. You can find them at

<https://bsky.app/profile/drbarber.bsky.social>

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## **HYDRA — SCREENSHOTS**

**Hydra** is an imaginative worldbuilder and friendly roleplayer in World of Warcraft and other games. He spends a lot of time Worldbuilding and writing while playing games and roleplaying with friends. He desires to find more friendly folks to roleplay with in WoW and other games or on Discord.

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## **J.S — CONTRIBUTOR**

**J.S.** is an avid fan of gaming from a young age and has always loved the fantasy genre. A big time lover of lore of games, J.S. began seriously Rping in World of Warcraft since WoD, but has played since Wrath, and his first foray into RP was actually in Guild Wars 2. J.S. also enjoys practicing writing, art and gaming in all games across all platforms. J.S. owes a lot to Rease who has been a great help in fleshing out RP characters and being a writing mentor.

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## MISCHI — ARTIST

I'm **Mischi**, a full-time, freelance artist currently working on a series of coloring books featuring strong women in fantasy, creating story dice and working on commissions. I began playing and RPing in Warcraft on Emerald Dream in 2007 with my main Ret Pally, Satyreh. While I still play, I haven't played much in recent years. But the memories of weaving stories with friends, family, foes and random encounters, and PVP victories and defeats in the open world, battlegrounds and arenas, are still so strong! I will always love WoW and the time I've spent in Azeroth. You can find me and my work at [misch.art](http://misch.art) or on [@MischiArt](https://www.instagram.com/MischiArt) on socials

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## REASE STONEHEART — WRITER EDITOR

**Rease** is an experienced Roleplayer who has been a part of the Warcraft Roleplay Community for ten years with no signs of slowing down. A writer who loves Fantasy, Horror, Sci-fi, and more, he's often bouncing between Azeroth and the created worlds of his original novels. Currently, he's working on his debut Novel Series "*Hearts of Stone in a City of Gold*" alongside the Warcraft Fanzine and other projects. You can find him at <https://linktr.ee/reasesoffice> for all that he's involved with.

## REVA — ARTIST

**Reva** is an Artist, Rper and in-game event organizer who has been playing WoW for 15 years while Rping for 6. She's a fan of drawing, gaming, collecting bones, fishing and hunting, and currently is running a Discord Server with her best friend where they catalogue Warcraft lore. A cryptid of sorts, you may be able to find her on Moon Guard hanging out on one of her many alts. You can find more of her art on her X and Instagram at <https://x.com/pastelpygmy> and <https://www.instagram.com/PastelPygmy>

## RUDHREDION NIGHTSTONE — WRITER

**Rudhredion Nighstone** is a Void Elf Occultist and Archeologist on the Moon Guard (A) server. He can also be spotted moonlighting as a bartender at the Rusty Nail Tavern every Tuesday Night on the Isle of Blackwake (Tol Barad proxy) His player can be found on [Bluesky](#) or discord at [TheCosmicDrake](#). Profile art by: [Instagram \(@colochirus.art\)](#)

## SANGUINIA — WRITER

**Sanguinia** is a lifetime enjoyer of genre fiction in all its flavors. Warcraft is just one of his many passions in the realm of fantasy, though it holds a special place in his heart. In addition to enjoying nerd ephemera, he also loves to engage with it as a writer and critic, creating fiction, analyses and indulging in roleplaying for many beloved universes. His current big project is a weekly series of essays critiquing and commenting on Final Fantasy XIV. You can follow his work on his [Ko-fi](#), or [Bluesky Profile](#), or, if you're truly desperate, on his [Twitter Profile](#).

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## SHALAIN BELFORD — CONTRIBUTOR

**Shalaine** is a veteran Roleplayer from before Vanilla Warcraft, enjoying RP maps on both WC3 and SC. He's been working on a number of projects, most of which aren't at a stage in development where they can be named, but rest assured, he has the community well in thought.

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## VIXELDA — ARTIST

**Vixelda** is an artist, writer, photographer, and overall creative soul with a passion for anything artistic that allows her to work with her hands and imagination. Her inspirations mainly come from the Scottish Highlands, where she currently lives. She is also an RPer who has been Rping on the Moon Guard server for several years and is presently planning many more adventures both in real life and in Azeroth. You can find her at <https://x.com/vixelda>

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## WOLFSONG WILDHEART — ARTIST

**Wolfsong Wildheart** is an artist, Rper, and amateur streamer who has been Rping in Warcraft for 18 years and has a lifelong passion for the arts. Currently, she owns a dog grooming business. She balances her time between her passions, business, and hobbies while entertaining her friends and having adventures with her husband, both in real life and Azeroth. You can find her artwork and information on her streams at <https://x.com/wildheartwolfs1>

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## WRAITH — ARTIST

**Wraith** is a longtime Blizzard fan of almost 30 years. Starting in the days of Warcraft II Tides of Darkness. A hobby artist and gamer who enjoys RPGs and has been involved with World of Warcraft RP since the early days of Moon Guard (US)'s opening during TBC. He can be found on his [Bluesky Profile](#) if you are interested in having some artwork done.



## ADDITIONAL CREDITS

There are plenty of other people who deserve to be credited for their contributions! The people below deserve to be just as celebrated as the people above because without them helping in other ways, this Issue would only have half the content it does.

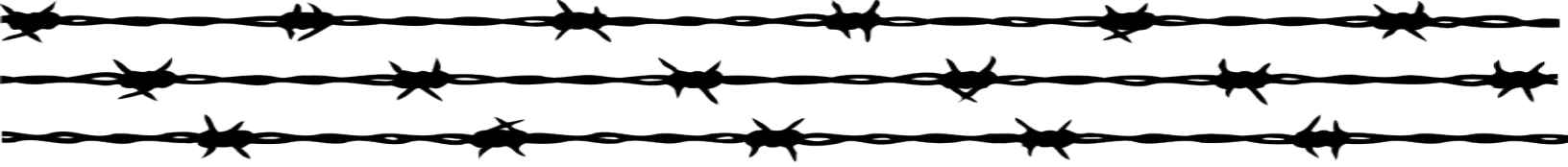
Even though they didn't directly submit something, we want to thank the following people:

- **Ayle\_OlaerArt** - <https://x.com/ayieartworks>
- **Dough**
- **Feyawen** - [Donated Fonts](#)
- **Goulis** - <https://ghoulisry.carrd.co/>
- **Hanabiraa** - <https://hanabiraaaart.carrd.co/>
- **KittysProduction Assets**
- **Kyphaz Art** - <https://kyphaz.carrd.co/>
- **Lilena Talem** - [Lilenaart.com](http://Lilenaart.com)
- **Mamabeefus** - <https://mamabeefus.com/>
- **NP4tch** - <https://x.com/NP4tch>
- **Palehorn Tea** - <https://x.com/PalehornTea>
- **Sonceri** - <https://sonceri.art/>
- **Starship: Team Chronos** - <https://www.starshipeu.org/>
- **Teemo Manabreak** - [Bluesky Profile](#)

The last group to thank is you, the readers. This project wouldn't continue without people who enjoy both Warcraft and the Fan Content that comes with it.

This issue was all about being punk, adventurous, and rebellious—everything that makes for amazing experiences and memorable shenanigans. Continue to be cool, ungovernable, and above all, **FUN**. We're looking forward to you joining us on our next adventure!

# FURTHER READING



Don't think this is the only Fanzine project out there, Pal! Warcraft is awesome because so many people love it and want to create Fan Content for it.

Check out everything below. You won't regret it.

If you're interested in Warcraft Roleplay and want to know how to get started, then you're in luck, pal! This Guidebook will teach you tips, tricks, and more to start creating your own adventures in Azeroth.

## [WORLD OF WARcraft Roleplay Guidebook](#)

Want to see the art and screenshots in this issue? Check out the galleries below to get a peep at them all.

## [WORLD OF WARcraft Fanzine Issue #3 Art Gallery](#)

## [WORLD OF WARcraft Fanzine Issue #3 Screenshots Gallery](#)

Want to see past Issues of the Fanzine? Be sure to check below for former Issues. They're full of additional stories, art, screenshots, and more. Lots of extra fun for free!

## [WORLD OF WARcraft Fanzine Past Issues](#)

# FURTHER READING PART 2

Now, what kind of community project would this be if we didn't include everyone else in the fun? Do you think this is the only one of its kind out there? Hardly!

Peep at the following links. You just might surprise yourself! Either way, you're in for a fun time.

## [Orctales](#)

You love Orcs? You into their lore, or stories about them? Then you're gonna love this Fanzine. It's a collection of awesome stories about Orcs, their culture, adventures, heroism, villainy, and what makes them unique.

## [Artists of Azeroth](#)

If you like Art and seeing what people do with their original characters, you'll love this zine, which is by artists for artists! It's currently on hold, but past issues are available, and many of the artists are still around.

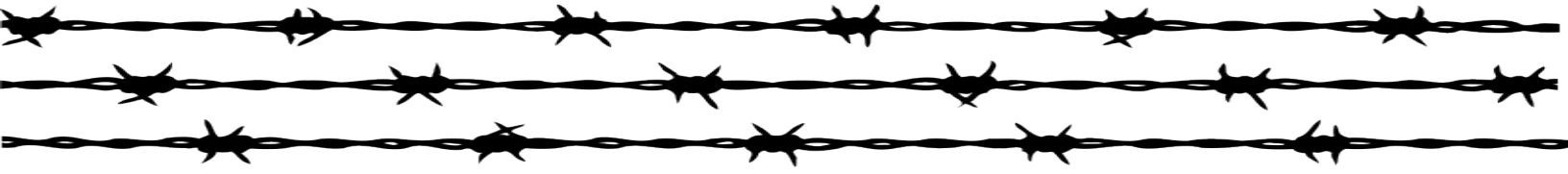
## [Elven Historical Chronicle](#)

This Fanzine project is completely devoted to chronicling both canon lore and player fanon while weaving it together. Part records keeping and part storytelling, it's an awesome resource for people who love elven lore and Roleplay. Plus, you get to read three volumes!

## [Interlude: Stories of Azeroth](#)

Love comics? Who doesn't? This Fanzine has a wide assortment of talented artists involved and is a great successor to "Artists of Azeroth" above. The best part is that each story is unique, making for a quick read that you'll want to reread again and again.

# FURTHER LISTENING



Do you think reading is the only thing we're interested in? Nah, pal! Writing and Art is only one way to enjoy Warcraft. In fact, a whole ecosystem of content creators have created stuff without lifting a pen or writing a word. There are dozens of podcasts, Twitch channels, and even musicians who love to create content based around Warcraft.

Listen in on the creators below, and see for yourself.

## STARSHIP

### [Starship](#)

"Starship" is a Warcraft group built around inclusivity and community building. It provides a nurturing atmosphere for players in a non-toxic space, is devoted to teaching and improving players, and gives them a fun place to make friends and unwind. Starship regularly hosts tournaments, events, giveaways, and more, and you can watch its partnered streamers on Twitch!

### [Zephyr Production](#)

Love epic orchestral music? Then Zephyrfang has you covered. While they only have a small selection for now, their music is phenonemal.



### [Oasis In Azeroth](#)



Every month, be sure to kick back, relax, and put on the Oasis. They, too, are a community-based group that hosts events. Their podcast topics range from lore to the current expansion to game mechanics and more, and they are excellent to listen to while grinding the game's content!

# FURTHER WATCHING

Who doesn't love to watch something? Sometimes, after reading and listening, it's good to kick back, turn your brain off, and watch some moving pictures. Plus, machinima has been a staple of Warcraft for years, dating back to vanilla!

Check out some of the ones below to get an idea of what awesome stories you can find on YouTube and other places.



## [IRONROTH EPISODE 2 - WHAT REMAINS](#)

Ironroth is back with an explosive second episode that's sure to leave viewers on the edge of their seats! From the minds of [Sir Thompshire](#), [Khono \(Ban'orak\)](#), and [Kaiser](#), this is an AU retelling of an Azeroth decimated by war after the Siege of Orgrimmar failed. Episode 2 takes place 14 years after the siege and details the lives of those who survive under Hellscream's reign. This is one project you should keep an eye on!



## TALES OF IRONROTH - MISSING IN KALIMDOR

***Tales of Ironroth*** is an Audio Drama series that takes place between the big Episodes. “*Missing in Kalimdor*” is an AD excellently written by **Kaiser** about John Keeshan and the troubles he finds himself in after the Siege of Orgrimmar failed. If you like 80s action flicks, and ramping danger then you’re gonna love this.



**Khono (Ban'orak)** is one of the other minds behind the Ironroth Project. If you like machinima films full of great characters, commentary on WoW Lore and Game Mechanics, speculations about future content or just want to kick back and watch some good ol' **gameplay** then be sure to check out their channel and give a follow/subscribe!"

