

Punching Bag
By Holo

Rejax's adventuring wasn't going so well today. The unlucky wolf had run afoul of a group of rather mean gnolls, and after subduing him, they had tied him up. Now, they were carrying him off across a field, towards a thick grove of trees that no doubt hid their camp. Rejax huffed, annoyed, and tried to wiggle his wrists and ankles free of their coarse, rope bindings. He was slung over the shoulder of the biggest gnoll there was, and he was roughly bounced with every big, heavy step the bulky gnoll took.

It didn't help that Rejax's belly was bulging full with slime. Every bounce made him wince and slosh, and it made his belly sore. It had been a small one this time, and it had only filled him up to a size a little bigger than a beach ball, but it was enough to be uncomfortable as it bounced against the gnoll's shoulder.

"Come on guys, seriously, put me down! I don't want anything to do with you! I was just scavenging for valuables! Slime residue! Seriously!" He thumped his hands against his captor's back, but the gnoll only grunted, and shifted Rejax on his shoulder, making the wolf grunt as his belly was shoved. Rejax huffed, but kept trying to wiggle free.

The journey ended at a camp tucked behind a thick copse of trees. The foliage concealed it from all sides, and the lush branches above hid it from the sky as well. Once the gnolls were in, they carelessly dropped Rejax to the ground. He grunted and scowled at the rough landing. "Fine, okay, I deserved that for shouting 'put me down' the entire way here, but that still hurt!"

They hardly acknowledged him as they took off their gear, littering the ground with crudely-constructed armor and various weapons. Rejax rolled over and managed to sit up, even with his limbs bound together, and he watched them in the hopes he'd find a chance to escape. The gnolls all gathered around a campfire and lit it up, and they started preparing for what looked like lunch. Rejax swallowed hard, but they started roasting meat over the campfire. He was glad that he wasn't on the menu.

He kept waiting for a chance to scoot away, but there was always at least one gnoll in the lunch circle with their eyes on him. They were talking to one another between bites, play punching one another, and occasionally gesturing over to their captive with an uproarious laugh. Rejax swiveled his ears, trying to make out what they were saying about him, but they talked low and laughed loud.

Rejax rolled his eyes and laid on his back, staring at the leaves while waiting for something, anything to happen. He was kinda glad he had stumbled on that slime first. The gnolls' food smelled good, but he was full enough that he wasn't compelled to ask for any. He had stopped struggling in his bindings as well; his wrists and ankles had grown sore from trying to work them for so long.

The sound of approaching footsteps pulled him from his thoughts, and he looked over as a couple of the gnolls approached. They were carrying lengths of rope in their hands, and they grabbed him roughly and lifted him up, tying loops of rope around his arms, thighs, and calves, until his limbs were effectively wrapped in a rope harness. Rejax grunted, and resumed his

struggling as the end of that tangle of rope was tossed over a thick tree branch, and he was hoisted into the air. “Hey! Put me down! What do I look like to you, a piñata?”

The gnolls looked between one another, grinned, then laughed. As they hoisted him higher, one of them got in close and whispered to him. “Yeah. You do.”

Rejax went wide-eyed as the gnolls began to line up. One of them finished fastening the other end of his rope line to the ground, keeping him in the air. With that done, the gnolls approached one at a time, and started using Rejax’s slime-filled belly like a punching bag. He grunted with every blow from the gnoll’s big, fuzzy fists. They were refraining from using their claws, but their strong bodies and large frames made every blow hit like a rolling boulder. He swung at the end of his rope as they pummeled his thick middle. His skin began to bruise under his fur, and because it was short and pure white, the purple and reddish colors were showing through.

The slime in his belly provided resistance akin to a punchable sandbag, and the gnolls were relishing their opportunity to train on him. Every strike made Rejax wince and grunt, and every few blows a particularly strong hit would knock the wind out of him. To make it worse, he was getting dizzy from swinging around so much on the rope, and his limbs were sore and burning from how much they were being pulled on. The combination of swinging and punching was turning his stomach, and the wolf was getting queasy.

Before he finally hucked, the gnolls backed off and let him stop swinging, giving him a chance to reorient himself so his eyes stopped spinning. He blinked a few times as the world slowly stopped wheeling around, but he was still seeing doubles of the nasty gnolls that had beat his belly. “Hic! A-alright guys, th-that’s enough...” Rejax groaned as his belly throbbed from the bruising.

“Hardly!” The gnolls chuckled at him as they crowded around and started throwing their pointy weapons in a pile on the floor beneath Rejax. He started to sweat as he eyed those shining edges and glimmering spikes.

“Uh, guys?” He gave a pleading look to his captors that went unheeded.

“Ready!” One last gnoll grabbed his axe and approached the rope tether that was holding Rejax aloft. “Cut him loose!”

“No no no augh!” The rope was cleaved, and Rejax fell, landing belly-first atop the weapons. All of the points pierced the tender skin of his pulverized stomach, and he split open with a wet splat. Slime splattered over the weapons and ground, along with globs of blood and the meaty chunks of organs that spilled out from Rejax’s blown-open middle.

Rejax yelped and rolled off the weapon pile, and his rope bindings were sliced to shreds as he did. He was clutching his middle as he lost his innards, and he grit his teeth from the pain as he rolled to the grass. The gnolls chuckled and rolled their eyes, turning their backs to him as they told him to get lost. Rejax nodded and hobbled off, slowly healing his injury as he went along. His pained scowl flickered into a smile as he went, and he rubbed a finger over the coin pouch he had pilfered from the gnolls when they weren’t paying attention. There was enough gold in it to last a couple months!