## Interest

Bilgewater Harbor was about the only decent place to set up shop for an entrepreneur. Sure, it was the Horde's jurisdiction, but things were a bit looser out on the fringes, and it was still the heart of Goblin civilization. You couldn't really say that about the slums. In there, you were right under the Warchief's thumb, but out in Azshara, you could be your own goblin. You didn't have to worry about the goon squad coming by to make sure things were on the up and up. If you were smart enough, the only goon squad was your own. The meathead orcs that were in Bilgewater were the ones that came to drink and gamble all their money away. The only meathead orcs that weren't at Bilgewater for the revelries were the two that were dragging a squirming, pleading goblin around the path, with another goblin walking ahead of the three of them.

"Come on, guys, we don't gotta do this!" Bebik cried out, looking between his captors as he was hoisted above the ground, arms firmly grasped by the orcs and legs flailing in the air, "I was gonna give him his cut, really I was!"

But that did nothing to halt their advance toward a small building toward the rear of the island, to which the goblin squirmed even harder.

"Hey, look, we can make a deal, right?" he tried, putting on his best oil salesman smile, though it was hard to hide the fear in his eyes, "What I found costs a lot of dough! That's a lotta gold that could be, uh, partially yours! Whaddya say? Ten percent?"

No response.

"Fifteen?"

Still nothing.

"Twenty percent it is!" he tried to laugh, "You guys drive a hard bargain."

The goblin in front stopped, which caused the two orcs to stop in their tracks. He slowly turned toward Bebik, who seemed to shrivel up in his gaze.

"I'm gonna need ya to shut yer trap." and slugged Bebik with a hard right fist to the face, causing the him to not only shut up but slump a bit. Shaking his punching hand, the goblin in front turned back around to head into the building, which was as ramshackle and haphazard as everything else in Bilgewater Harbor, as everything else was back on Kezan.

Home sweet home.

The front goblin booted the door open, and gestured into the open doorway with his thumb, through which the two Orcs tossed the silent and dangling Bebik.

"Back, boss." the goblin announced as he stepped over Bebik's prone form as he sauntered up to the desk, leaning against it with his arm for support.

Behind the desk, another goblin sat tilted back in his chair with his large bare feet propped upon it. His pants were a little worn and frayed, same as his vest. It wasn't that he couldn't afford better clothes, it was just that there were a lot better things to spend money on, and it was something that Neddix lived by. Running a hand through his slick-back blonde hair, Neddix pushed back slightly and set his feet back on the floor as he rose from his seat.

"So where'd ya find him, Ziddix?" he asked, coming around his desk to nudge at Bebik with his foot.

The other goblin, Ziddix, shrugged as he stood over Bebik alongside Neddix, "Found him diggin' in a tomb in Uldum. Was thinkin' about buryin' him there, but..."

Neddix laughed, "Think he's gonna wish ya had by the time I'm done with him." Looking over to the hulking orcs, he nodded to a door in the rear, "Take him in back. I'll be right there."

The two orcs came forward from the doorway, hoisted up Bebik again and carried him past the desk, through the door that sat behind it.

Ziddix watched as Bebik was hauled to the back, "He the last one?"

"Last one." Neddix replied, cracking his knuckles with a yellow grin, "For now, 'least." He headed back around the desk, and bent over, opening a drawer and rummaging around. Ziddix could hear a great deal of coin clinking in the desk. Neddix soon straightened back up, tossing him a fat coinpurse. "Little somethin' to show ya I care."

"Thanks, boss." Ziddix said, tucking the money away, before looking back at the door, then giving a grin to Neddix, "Mind if I watch the show?"

With an exaggerated gesture, Neddix indicated the back room, "After you."

Ziddix chuckled, plodding toward the back door. Neddix reached down toward his discarded boots under the desk, but then stopped, thought for a moment, then shook his head no, grinning a bit wider as he followed Ziddix into the back room.

~\*~

Bebik's head was pounding when his eyes finally opened. He groaned as he sat up and rubbed

his jaw. Man, that mook could hit HARD. Looking around, he tried to get a grasp of his situation. He sat in a dark cell. No cot. No window. Just bars, and even then, it was covered by some sort of drape, so the light barely touched it. He could hear muffled voices around him. Were there other cells? Where the hell was he?

Moving to the bars, he slammed his fists against it, "Hey! Come on, lemme outta here! This can all be worked out! Just lemme talk to-"

Bebik was cut off by a sudden whooshing noise and the drape being removed from the cage, letting in a blinding flash of light. He squinted and rubbed at his eyes, trying to adjust them to the light. When they focused, instead of looking out into wherever he was, he was instead staring into an enormous red eye beyond the bars. Bebik screamed.

"LOOK WHO'S FINALLY AWAKE!" Neddix's voice boomed, "FEELIN' BETTER?"

Bebik immediately scurried back to the wall of the cell, breathing heavily. "N-Neddix...?" he whimpered. The eye pulled back, showing the full face of the moneylender, now ten times as big. A hundred times! Bebik couldn't do the calculations correctly right at that moment, but Neddix was absolutely enormous.

"HEY, LOOKIT THAT, HE'S GOT A CLUE." the sarcasm dripped from the giant goblin's voice as he grinned unpleasantly at Bebik.

"H-how did you get so HUGE?" Bebik gulped.

"NAH, SCRATCH THAT LAST PART," Neddix shook his head, peering down at his prey, "HE'S STILL CLUELESS. I DIDN'T GROW ANY, NIMROD. I JUST SHRUNK YOU DOWN WITH A LITTLE BIT OF FLAWLESS GOBLIN TECHNOLOGY."

"What'd ya do THAT for!?" Bebik cried out.

"DID YA REALLY THINK YA COULD TRY AND SCREW ME OVER, KID? I FUNDED THAT LITTLE EXPEDITION OF YOURS AND YA REALLY THOUGHT I WAS JUST GONNA LET YOU WALK AWAY WITH EVERYTHING THAT YA FOUND?"

"L-Like I was telling your hired goon..." Bebik watched Neddix fearfully, trying to explain, "I was gonna give you your cut, Neddix! Honest! Ain't no way I was ever gonna try and keep you outta the loop!"

"SO WHAT'S THIS ABOUT FINDIN' LOOT IN AN ULDUM TOMB AND TRYIN' TA SELL IT OFF WITHOUT GIVIN' ME WORD 'BOUT IT?"

"It wasn't like that!" Bebik waved his arms, "I can tell you all about it, just grow me back!"

"I ALREADY KNOW ALL ABOUT IT, BUB." Neddix replied, "AND MY BOYS ARE MAKING SURE I GET WHAT I'M DUE. PLUS INTEREST. AND INTEREST ON THE INTEREST. HELLS, I'M TAKIN' THE WHOLE SHEBANG."

"Fine!" Bebik exclaimed, "Take it all! Now please just LET ME GO!"

A loud laugh followed that. Neddix doubled over, holding his stomach with a stream of guffaws that almost deafened little Bebik. After a few moments of laughing, Neddix straightened back up and glared at the tiny Goblin, "NAH. THE MONEY CAN BE GOTTEN EASILY. IT'S THE TRUST THAT I GOT A PROBLEM WITH. YOU'RE GONNA LEARN WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YA SCREW OVER NEDDIX GOLDENGRAB."

Bebik watched as Neddix reached overhead, grabbing the top of the cell and picked it up, jostling it about. A few short moments later, it was placed on what looked like the floor. Bebik could watch Neddix's green feet pad back and forth in front of his cell as he seemed to be moving the other cells around his own. Now he could see who else had been talking when he first came to.

He definitely wasn't the only one that Neddix had rounded up. There were at least three other goblins that he could see, two male and one female, a male orc, and a female Pandaren. They were all as tiny as he was and just as confused - some of them were a bit more scared than others.

"SO, HERE WE ALL ARE." Neddix's voice suddenly boomed out again for all to hear, "I GOT THREE WISEASSES THAT TRY TO SCREW ME OUTTA WHAT I'M OWED, A HOWLIN' MONKEY OF AN ORC THAT TRIES TO STRONGARM ME, A DOLL THAT TRIES TO GET TO MY WALLET THROUGH MY HEART, AND A SMARTER-THAN-THE-AVERAGE BEAR THAT JUST UP AND TRIES TO BREAK INTO MY VAULT." He snickered derisively down at them, "AIN'T YOU A MOTLEY CREW."

The cages were moved about to face the door at the far end of the room, where Neddix's two orc guards on either side of it. From his cell, Bebik could also see the goblin with the strong punch, Ziddix, off to one side, watching with apparent interest.

"ALLA YA CAN SEE THAT DOOR WAY BACK THERE." it wasn't a question. Of course they could. They'd have to be blind not to see it. Neddix went on, "NOW, SINCE YA DECIDED TO STEP ON **MY** TOES, I FIGURED I'D REPAY IN KIND... WITH INTEREST. SOME OF THE SMARTER OF YA WILL HAVE FIGURED THIS OUT BY NOW BUT FOR THE SLOW ONES, I'LL SPELL IT OUT FOR YA."

One of the cages creaked open, and Bebik could see the orc stumbling out, looking around warily, but definitely looking for something. A few feet away, he saw Neddix pad back into view, toes facing toward all of them. The orc noticed and growled in anger.

"COME ON, TOUGH GUY." Neddix snickered, "THINK YA CAN STRONGARM ME NOW?"

Whether it was a trap or not, the orc didn't care and gave a mighty roar. Moving his feet, he charged toward the titanic goblin. For his part, Neddix watched with a raised eyebrow, blinking in bewilderment and amusement as the tiny orc ran at him to attack him. Maybe the orc thought he could get lucky. Maybe he thought he could do his ancestors proud or some idiotic honor thing like that. In either case, he failed miserably.

As soon as the orc got close, Neddix lifted one massive bare foot above him. The orc saw what was about to happen, but wasn't able to move in time as the goblin stamped his foot down. The roaring from the orc quickly turned into a squelch as he was easily flattened under Neddix's foot. Bebik almost retched as the orc completely disappeared underfoot, watching Neddix slowly grind his foot, completely squashing the orc beneath him. Slowly, Neddix dragged his foot back, leaving a thin, red smear against the floor.

"GOT IT NOW?" he said, wriggling his toes, "YA CAN TRY AND BEG ME, I ALWAYS LOVE HEARIN' IT, OR YA CAN TRY AND ESCAPE OUT THAT BACK DOOR. OTHERWISE, I'M GONNA SQUASH YA LIKE BUGS."

The chatter became animated among the remaining prisoners as Neddix stepped away again. Bebik heard the creaking as, one by one, the cage doors were opened. Bebik wasn't going anywhere, he crouched in a corner and didn't move. But apparently, the others were of a different mindset.

One of the male goblins had started running full-sprint toward the door. Either he was used to running from the law or dodging a footbomb. Whatever the case may be, he was hauling ass. But it wasn't going to get him very far.

Casually, and in only a few steps, Neddix caught up to him and stomped one foot down right in front of him, causing the goblin to run right into his heel. The impact knocked him back and put him in a daze. That was just enough time for Neddix to slide his foot back and pin him directly beneath the heel.

"SO, MAZZUP," Neddix grinned down at his foot, where the tiny goblin squirmed, but just barely, "YA NEEDED HELP TO OPEN UP A HOT FISH SHOP. SOMEHOW IT BURNED DOWN AND YOU JUST TRIED TO DISAPPEAR WITH THE INSURANCE MONEY, WITHOUT THINKIN' OF YOUR OLD PAL NEDDIX, WHO WAS GENEROUS TO GIVE YOU A SIZEABLE LOAN?"

He ground the heel in slightly. If it wasn't so tough, he might have felt a few of Mazzup's bones crack beneath it. But he definitely heard him scream out in pain. But he just laughed.

"I KNOW HOW YA FEEL, BUDDY." Neddix said, "HERE, LEMME HELP YA OUT." The giant

goblin lifted up his heel slightly. Down beneath it, writhing in pain Mazzup looked up.

Just in time to see a cruel smirk adorn Neddix's lips as the heel stamped back in. Mazzup was barely able to let out a yelp before he was squashed instantly and ground into pulp as Neddix twisted the heel about for good measure.

Neddix looked around for the rest of the debtors when he felt something at his foot. Looking down, he saw the female goblin waving her arms up at him.

"Babe!" she cried out, "Babe, it's me, Minxie! Come on, there's gotta be a mistake here!"

"AH, MINXIE, I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN ABOUT YA." He said, feet on either side of her as he stared her down, "YA THOUGHT YA CHARMED YOUR WAY INTO MY VAULT. GOT THE KEY AND EVERYTHING, DIDN'T YA?"

"I-I was just goin' in to make sure everything was... was where ya left it, babe!" Minxie tried, smiling weakly up at him, "But I didn't take anything! I swear!"

"COURSE YA DIDN'T." he replied smugly, "CAUSE AS SOON AS YA OPENED THE VAULT DOOR, YA WOULDA BEEN KNOCKED RIGHT OUT FROM THE GAS IN THE ROOM. AND YA WAKE UP IN ONE'A MY LITTLE CAGES."

While Neddix was having his conversation with his former paramour, the other male goblin had made fairly decent headway in trying to reach the rear door. For his part, Tizzik was certain he'd done nothing to earn Neddix's ire. ...Well, after thinking about it for a few moment, he remembered that he DID call him "Ned" once. And BOY, had Neddix been pissed. Also, there HAD been that little incident where he'd tried to corner the market on Ooze oil and borrowed a crapton of money from Neddix to do it. How was he supposed to know that ooze was only good for corroding and not lubricating?! Surely Neddix could understand.

Even as Tizzik justified it to himself that he'd done absolutely nothing wrong, he gulped, rubbing his throat and looked up at the doorway. He was so close now, even with those two titanic orcs on either side of it. Getting out would be a piece of cake. No problem. Absolutely nothing to worry abo-oh crap, one of them saw him.

Indeed, one of the orcs had seen him and had slowly lurched forward toward him, massive bare feet shaking the ground beneath his feet with each step. Tizzik stumbled backwards, trying to get some distance between him and the giant orc. But a hundred of his tiny footsteps matched up to only one of the orc's. In his haste to back up, Tizzik stumbled over himself and fell straight onto his butt.

Too easy.

The last thing Tizzik saw was the orc staring down impassively, before raising his gigantic, filthy sole above him and stepping down. Tizzik barely had a chance to scream out as the bulky foot fell atop him and pressed down firmly with a squelch. The orc ground the ball of his foot in slightly, before stepping back and folding his arms as he stood guard at the doorway once again, only a small red smear on the floor remaining of Tizzik.

Meanwhile, Neddix had pinned Minxie beneath his big toe, pressing down just enough to keep her in place for the time being, despite her begging and supplications.

"SEE, I JUST AIN'T FEELIN' LIKE YOU'RE REALLY SORRY FOR DOIN' WHAT YA DID, DOLL." he peered down at her, eyes narrowed, "I THINK YA JUST SORRY YA GOT CAUGHT."

"B-babe, please, I really am sorry!" she whimpered, cowering beneath his toe, pressing her hands against the tough yet spongy toeflesh, "I mean it!"

Neddix shrugged, grinning slyly down at her, "ALRIGHT THEN. SHOW ME YA MEAN IT. PUCKER UP."

"W-What?" she blinked up at him, confused.

"I SAYS, PUCKER UP AND PLANT ONE RIGHT ON THAT TOE."

Minxie stared at the toe that was pinning her in place with a sour expression. She'd never been too proud to beg, but this was just degrading. Still... she could tell he was serious. He'd already gone and stamped out two others like they were bugs. But she was different, right? She took another look up at him, and he was grinning from ear to ear like Gallywix himself. She knew he'd do it.

"STILL AIN'T FEELIN' IT, DOLL." he thundered up above.

Steeling herself - and her stomach - Minxie lifted her head up close enough and kissed her boyfriend's toe. Shuddering, she dropped her head back, only to see Neddix still staring down at her.

"WELL?" he asked, "THAT ALL YA GONNA DO?"

"What...!?" she sputtered, "I kissed your foot like ya told me to!"

"AND YA THINK THAT MAKES US SQUARE, HUH?"

"I did what ya told me to!" she protested.

"KEEP GOIN'!" he glared down at her, "KEEP KISSIN' THAT TOE 'TIL I TELL YA OTHERWISE."

"Neddy, come on-!" she stopped short, mouth closed, eyes wide.

Neddix's own eyes were wide. And they were angry.

"WHAT... DID YA CALL ME?" he growled down at her.

"I-it was a slip of the tongue, babe, that's all!" she cringed.

The toe was lifted off of her but in an instant it had flicked her back. She flew back with a cry and landed a short distance away from Bebik's cage. With a groan, she tried picking herself up. But Neddix's thunderous footsteps came right up to her and he'd lifted one foot in the air over her, glaring at her.

"IF I TELLS YA ONCE, I'VE TOLD YA A THOUSAND TIMES." his voice was an eerie calm.

Minxie lifted her arm, as if trying to block herself from the giant foot, "Babe, please, wait, NO-!"

That was as far as she got before Neddix stomped his foot down, easily smushing his girlfriend beneath his broad sole. Twisting his sole around to make sure Minxie was ground to a stain, he glared down where she used to be. "DON'T CALL ME 'NEDDY." He scraped the foot back, smearing the stain across the floor.

Exhaling shortly, he smoothed his hair back again, glancing around, talking to himself. "LET'S SEE... THAT WAS GORM, MAZZUP, AND MINXIE..." he strolled over toward the door, noting the stain made by the guard, "AND THAT WAS TIZZIK. FOUR DOWN, TWO TO GO."

Yingzi Gan had made considerable progress while Neddix had toyed around with his. She'd prided herself on not getting caught back in Pandaria, and had made away with enough gold to retire in style. But when the mists fell and the newcomers came to their shores, the goblins and their supposed uncrackable vaults intrigued her. So she left her homeland to find new challenges in the new world. But the first vault she cracked ended up being a trap, same as the female goblin. And now, here she was, creeping along the wall as any rogue worth their gold knew how, trying to survive this madman's idea of a "sporting challenge."

She watched as Neddix looked about the floor for her and the other tiny goblin. She'd not seen him leave his cage, but that would be his own undoing. She only had time to worry about herself. And at that moment, she was so close to the door. Rather, she was close to the other orc guard. Grimacing, she looked at her options. She could either move around in front of his feet or sneak behind his heels. Both were dangerous, but this entire situation was dangerous. But sneaking behind meant that she would at least be somewhat blocked from the giant goblin's view. Taking a deep breath, she began creeping against the wall. She passed behind the first heel without trouble. But the second was closer to the wall. Yingzi paused for a moment, then pressed her

back against the wall, sucking in her stomach and trying to squinch behind it. She was close now. She could almost taste freedom.

Then it happened.

Idly, the orc guard shifted and pressed his heel against the wall, pinning and crushing the thief's legs between his heel and the wall. The pain surged through her and tried as she might, she could not hold back the scream of anguish that escaped from her mouth. The orc guard moved his foot away and stepped away slightly to look down at her as she crumpled to the floor, shaky hands gripping at her leg.

Noticing the commotion and the movement, Neddix sauntered over, standing above the fallen Pandaren with a grin.

"FIND SOMETHING, BIG GUY?" he glanced to the guard, who twisted his mouth into an unpleasant smile.

Despite the pain, Yingzi tried moving toward the door with her arms scraping the floor, desperate for her chance at freedom. A chill ran down her spine when, from up above, she heard Neddix again.

## "SQUASH HER."

She struggled faster, even as a shadow fell over her. She turned her head slightly to see the orc with his foot over her, face still curled into that terrible smile. Neddix stood over her as well, watching the orc's foot with approval. With a cry, she tried moving faster, but was not fast enough to avoid the giant green sole to stomp down upon her. All of Yingzi's exploits came to an end as the pandaren was squashed beneath the giant orc's massive sole.

Neddix wheeled around to the face the room as the guard scraped the remains of the pandaren over the floor. His eyes darted around, scanning the floor. That had been number five. But the latest one, the one Ziddix had just retrieved for him, was nowhere to be seen. Nonchalantly, his walked toward the supposedly empty cage.

"BEBIK!" the sole remaining debtor cringed inside his cage as Neddix called his name, watching his massive feet pad closer to him, "YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE LEFT. IF YA JUST GIVE UP, I GIVE YA MY WORD THAT I AIN'T GONNA STOMP YA."

Bebik's heart leapt up into his throat. Amnesty? Was he talking about getting off scot-free? He doubted it. As sick as Neddix was, it probably only meant he'd do something even worse. Like bite his head off off or feed him to a shark or something else terrible. Five people, all wiped out in less than five minutes, either by Neddix or one of his guards. The only one that hadn't done anything was Ziddix, who was crouching nearby and seemed intent on simply watching

everything that happened. What was he waiting for?

He didn't have much time to wonder as he jostled about. The cage was being lifted up. Bebik looked around frantically for something to hold onto. But quickly enough, the cage tilted and he was sliding fast toward the wide opening. He clawed at the metal floor of his cage, hoping to get a lucky break. When that failed, he tried to grab hold of the edge but it just barely escaped his grasp sending him plummeting to his doom. Bebik squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the end.

Much quicker than he expected, he hit the ground. Also, contrary to expectations, the ground was tough, but still had something of a softness about it. Was he dead? No, his eyes were just closed. But he felt his stomach drop, like it was still plummeting. He wasn't sure he wanted to open his eyes. He didn't want to open his eyes. He resisted opening his eyes.

Oh, damnit, he KNEW he should have kept his eyes closed.

All he saw when he opened his eyes was the expanse of Neddix's open palm, and Neddix himself leering down at him from above.

"THERE YA ARE." he chuckled, as he tossed the cage away with his other hand, a distant clang resonating in Bebik's ears, "THOUGHT YA MIGHTA WANDERED OFF."

The ringing stopped shortly and Bebik squiggled back as much as he could without falling off, "W... wh-what are ya gonna do?" he stuttered.

"WELL, GAVE YA MY WORD I WASN'T GONNA STOMP YA." Neddix replied, "AND YA KNOW ME, I LIKE KEEPIN' MY WORD. DON'T HAPPEN THAT OFTEN BUT IT'S GONNA HAPPEN THIS TIME. LUCKY YOU, RIGHT?"

Bebik could have been relieved, had Neddix not still been giving him that leer. And he was right to be wary.

Deftly, Neddix had picked Bebik up between thumb and forefinger and brought him up to eye level, dangling him above the floor. "YA KNOW, IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I GOT RID OF SOMEONE THIS WAY. BUT YA AIN'T GONNA LEAVE A MESS, SO..." And with that, Neddix opened his mouth and began lowering Bebik in.

Bebik screamed, clawing at the fingers holding him desperately, terrified at the prospect of being devoured, but to no avail. Neddix's breath washed over him as he was lowered into the giant's waiting maw. Once inside, he tried scrambling for Neddix's still-open mouth, but was left in darkness as it snapped shut. Almost immediately, he was assaulted by Neddix's tongue, covering him in saliva. The air was foul and Bebik found himself hard of breathing, even if he weren't screaming all the way.

Outside, Neddix tilted his head back, and tumbled the tiny goblin to the back of his throat. A moment more and his throat muscles pulled poor Bebik down in a mighty swallow. Neddix stuck his tongue out, making a disgusted face.

"Ech." he apparently disapproved of the way Bebik went down, "Now I remember why I don't do that very often."

"Taste that bad, boss?" Ziddix asked with a chuckle.

"Eh, I've prolly had worse, but... blech." Neddix shuddered, "I shoulda just swatted him instead."

Ziddix stood from where he'd been watching the proceedings, tapping his foot "So that takes care of ya worst debtors. So what're ya gonna do next?"

"Just keep doin' what I've been doin'." Neddix grinned, heading toward the door that led out to the office, "Hopefully, the next group that decides to borrow money from Neddix Goldengrab knows what it means to pay interest."

Followed by Ziddix and his loyal orc meatheads, Neddix stepped out of the backroom and into his office where he once again took his seat behind his desk, leaned back, feet propped up on top. He grunted to himself as he did so. Damnit. He'd meant to let one of 'em go, only to help spread the word that he wasn't a goblin to be trifled with. Then again, who'd really believe 'em? Besides, the less attention he got from the Warchief, the better.

He heard the door creak open. Moving his feet slightly, he watched as an older goblin lady enter, white hair down covering one eye. She raised an eyebrow at Neddix, barefoot, on his desk.

"You Neddix Goldengrab?" she asked, placing a hand on her hip.

"That's me, doll." he smiled at her. But she didn't smile back. She looked like she hadn't smiled for a long time.

"Heard ya might be the one to talk to 'bout gettin' some gold." she replied.

Neddix sat up in his seat and folded his hands before him, smiling that yellow smile. "Let's have a chat, then."

The End