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# Strakx

A Never Realm Story

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**O**K, so he didn't know much magic. Strakx kicked the dirt in the road with his feet, sending the dry dust into a throat-choking cloud. It wasn't right, the Grexx exiling him as they did. It had taken them 500 years to escape the clutches of the undead lich who had enslaved them. Everything his ancestors had learned had to be pruned from the clutches of their undead master. Did they think such feats were a simple matter? Did they think a slave could simply pick up knowledge of the dark arts via an extension course at the local agricultural school? He continued down the lone forest road, thrusting for revenge. He'd show them. If there is one thing a Goblin is good at, it's revenge.

The Wemusan forest was spacious and diverse. The single road running through it was dominated by elm, hawthorn, and hazel, with only occasional openings which allowed little light through. Still, it was enough for the moss to lay claim to the moist and fertile rock layer below. At one end lay the thriving town of Nagdohar and at the far side lay the Obrene Highlands. It had been a quiet little place, with swooping tree limbs and a mishmash of low-lying shrubs, desperately trying to avoid the shadows. That is until gold was discovered.

Prices skyrocketed as dwarfish prospectors rushed in from every corner of the known world. If it had only been the dwarfs, no one would have paid the place much mind; no, it was the goblins who caused a ruckus. The Wemusan forest was the perfect hideout since goblins enjoyed living in dark and shadowy places. Being raiders at heart, they couldn't resist the protracted line of heavily laden and unguarded gold wagons which trekked down the single road. At first, the dwarfs hired guards, but the soaring prices cut deep into the miner's profits ... when the guards didn't simply run away to become prospectors.

When Strakx entered Nagdohar, no one seemed to notice. He had a strong instinctual desire to stab someone with a knife to get some attention, but he fought the impulse down. He just continued to chew on his clay pipe. The town itself looked dreadful. A hodgepodge of buildings was flung about, apparently at random, complete with blackened rooftops and half rotting walls. Even the atmosphere was dull and dismal. The sky being an ugly shade of grey and the air stagnant. Being a respectable goblin, Strakx liked it at once.

In contrast to the old, decaying buildings, new construction was going up in every open corner, to accommodate the sudden influx of new residents. However, each work site was nothing more than piles of wood and stone, surrounded by half-finished walls. But even these were overcrowded with dirt covered dwarfs desperate for any place to lay their hats.

The main attraction was Rustron's Tavern, its ivy-covered walls were constructed over 50 years ago and seemed to be in the same state of disrepair as the rest of the original town. From the outside it looked depressing and cold, the perfect establishment for a hard-working goblin, Strakx smiled. It was impossible to see through the dirty windows, but the fact the place was packed could be felt from outside.

Strakx entered the tavern through a heavy, iron door, and found the place packed wall to wall with hard drinking dwarfs. He had quite the time pushing his way through the mob to get to the bar. He even had to crawl between a few legs. The bartender was busy coughing into a dirty rag and made no effort to acknowledge the goblin's presence.

"Excuse me," Strakx bellowed, turning his spear into a flaming torch. "But I come about the job." He held up a flyer.

Almost no one took any notice. Finally, the bartender glanced at him and pointed with his thumb, “back room.”

The walls of the back room were covered in a layer of dust, making it nearly impossible to even read the many job postings which had been placed there, each one overlapping another. Compared to the bar, this room appeared abandoned. When the bartender closed the door behind them it became eerily silent, giving Strakx a comfortable feeling of dread.

“You realize,” the dwarf said whipping his extensive nose with the rag, “You’re a goblin.”

“I know.” Strakx nodded with a cheerful look on his face. “Can’t think of a better person to catch other goblins, can you?”

“Take off that ridiculous hat,” the dwarf demanded in a disgusted tone. Strakx was wearing a wide-brimmed and tall conical black hat. It displayed a spread of silver stars painted there by some artist who couldn’t have been more than five.

“Sorry,” Strakx said, “I thought it was standard business attire.” He stuffed the hat into his fur-lined shirt and pulled out a filthy leather cap, whose sides, intended to warm human ears, merely forced his long ears to point downward. Curious, Rustrom Ingotbeard, the tavern owner as well as bartender asked, “Why would you want this job?”

“I am Strakx, Warcaster of the Grexx ... that’s a local goblin clan, in case you didn’t know.” He waited for a response, but Rustrom kept wiping his nose. “My brothers are now rich from robbing caravans on the Obrene Road. The raiding is so easy they have little use for my services, so I could use the work.”

“Treachery amongst goblins,” the dwarf bartender snorted, “Almost cliché. You’re hired.”

Strakx straightened himself up to appear presentable, “Don’t you want to know my qualifications?”

The dwarf shrugged, “Who cares.”

“Good,” Strakx snickered. “Because the spear torching thing is the only trick I can do.”

The dwarven bartender shook the goblin’s hand, “Congratulations, you’re now the new Constable of Nagdohar.”

Strakx chewed on the end of his unlit clay pipe, “Good, let’s gather all the town militia and we’ll proceed to the Goblin camp. That’ll teach those ungrateful retches a lesson.”

“Good luck with that,” Ingotbeard laughed. It was a hearty laugh which emanated from deep within the Dwarf’s chest. As with all laughter, which was usually at Strakx’s expense, it made him feel uncomfortable.

Strakx’s red, beady eyes gave him a sideways glance as his small fangs crept over his lower lip, “Don’t you have a militia?”

The dwarf seemed distressed, “Course we do. A right fine one too. Except they are all out prospecting.”

Stuffing his rag up his sleeve, Rustrom headed back to the door which led to the bar in a casual manner, “So, you don’t what the job then?”

"I didn't say that," the goblin protested, "It's just going to be a might more difficult than I imagined." He followed the dwarf back into the bar. The noise level was just as high as he remembered it. He turned to Ingotbeard, "I forgot to ask, does this job come with a salary?"

"One-quarter of all the loot you recover," the bartender replied.

Strakx started pushing his way back towards the door. "Wait a minute," the dwarf bartender called after him, "I'll announce you." He jumped up on the bar. Rather sprightly a leap it was too, for a dwarf of his apparent age. The room went silent, except for the thumping of ale tankards slammed on tables. "This here is our new constable ... what's your name again son?"

The goblin straightened up to his full three-foot height and announced, "Strakx, Warcaster of ..."

"Right ... Strakx" the dwarf climbed down from the top of the bar and returned to wiping his nose.

"Strakx, make sure you sign in at the constable's office." The dwarf instructed him.

For a brief moment, everyone remained silent. All at once, the ruckus started up again, as if nothing had ever happened. Strakx had to fight his way back out to the door again. Closing the heavy door behind him, the street seemed almost silent in comparison. The sun was busy shining, which was not Strakx's preferred environment. Cold damp and ugly were much more a goblin's style. Strakx spent most of the rest of the day searching for the constable's office. It turned out to be a low deteriorating structure built with crumbling white brick. It had tall, wide windows ... designed to accommodate the bars, which let in plenty of light; much too much for Strakx's taste. If they didn't have a dark, damp and wonderfully ugly dungeon below it, he'd have to have them build one.

Inside, a dwarf in a pair of brown leather overalls had his feet up on the desk. The two cells in the back appeared to be the drunk tank and were fully occupied. Not only were all the cots taken, but there was a crowd curled up with blankets on the floor. "You the deputy?" Strakx snorted.

"Hell, no." The dwarf replied. Strakx suspected he had crawled in here with the intent to find a less crowded place to sleep.

Strakx eyed him with his empty red eyes, "Get out."

The dwarf practically fell over himself trying to make it to the door. The goblin marched straight to the drunk tank and sneered at the inhabitants, "I'm the new Constable of Nagdohar. Normally I'd make it a point to forget you are in here. Eating any of the food designated for the prisoners, but I'm feeling charitable. Any of you who want to accompany me to sack the goblin camp will be granted a full pardon and released."

Nobody moved. No one even stirred. Finally, a lone dwarf raised his head ... and quietly turned over.

Strakx cleared his throat, "Did I mention you'll receive a share of ten percent of the loot we recover?" Every dwarf was now stood on his feet, anxious to be released from the cell.

Strakx took them down to the blacksmith's shop. The smith himself was off prospecting, but two apprentices were hard at work. There being a shortage of weapons available, Strakx armed his mob with shovels, pickaxes and a few assorted mining implements which were lying around. Strakx figured the

sight of this mob should scare the bejesus out of his brothers ... and if not, well they were only drunken dwarfs anyway. No great loss.

Leading the way, he paraded his personal army straight down the road into the Wemusan forest. As they ventured deeper in the darkened woods, Strakx issued orders to his followers, "Now when we get there, I want half of you to fan out to the right and the other half to circle around to the left. Keep your heads low. My brothers have a habit of shooting off a flight of poisoned arrows at any approaching interlopers, but they tend to overshoot; most creatures being taller than your average goblin. Just keep your heads down and you'll be fine. Everybody got that?" Strakx turned around to face the dwarfs.

The road was empty.

He trudged back to town and broke into the local library. Waving away the librarians, he crashed about until he located the arcane arts section. He began going through the books, one at a time. It might have been better if he had stopped to read the titles first, but he was in a bit of a hurry. Finally, he found an incantation which created the sound of armed forces marching. He memorized the procedure and headed back for the woods.

A discord of military voices, belonging to men of the heavy-armored verity, reverberated through the air, strangely synchronized with the occasional sounds of snapping twigs beneath great siege engine's wheels. All this could be heard as the lone goblin strode proudly back to the dark trees. Overhead, Strakx heard a high-pitched voice cry out, "Damn, I rolled a four. That's not good enough, is it?"

His incantation failed and the forest went back to its usual, nature-based, sounds. The birds sang and the frogs burped. But not a sound of armed men could be heard. Strakx looked around for the source of the voice but could find nothing. He was still quite some ways from camp so it most likely hadn't been one of his brothers. He searched under a few low-lying bushes anyway but came up empty-handed. Dejected he headed back for his office. Maybe he'd have better luck tomorrow.

Strakx muttered a few choice words about his dwarf 'volunteers' and walked through the building door. When he looked around, he wasn't in his office, but in some kind of cellar. Six young humans were gathered around a flimsy looking table dressed in a way Strakx had never seen before. The table was filled with an assortment of papers and books. "You folks care to explain to me what you are doing in my office?" Strakx demanded.

The humans eyed each other. "Well, it not really your office," the youngest one explained, "We're playing a game. You're one of our characters."

Strakx took his clay pipe out of his mouth and snorted, "Are you trying to tell me you're gods?"

"No, not at all. I'm Mike," He pointed to the figures seated around the table, "This is my roommate Kevin, my girlfriend Jayden, Larry, Sherry and that's Isoroku over there."

They all waved greetings. The last one had to put his head up from behind some kind of lighted picture frame to wave his hand.

"We're playing this role-playing game. You make up characters and you roll these dice ..." Mike picked up a few up off the table to demonstrate, "and we have adventures and stuff."

Strakx stared back at them, more confused than ever.

Mike left his chair and walked over to a bearded fellow with long hair. "You're Larry's character." Mike held up a single piece of paper. It was filled with words and numbers. In the upper corner as a colorfully draw picture of ... a goblin .... Strakx himself. Larry waved his hand and meekly added, "Hi." Strakx instantly recognized the voice as the one he'd been searching for in the woods.

"You're shorter than I pictured you. Maybe a little greener than I thought. Is that dagger real?" Jayden sputtered.

Strakx closed his eyes and shook his head. When he opened his eyes again ... yep, they were all still there.

These people had obviously all gone around the deep end. Without much of a recourse, Strakx decided to play along. "So, which one of you is Rustrom Ingotbeard?"

"That would be me," Kevin put up his hand. In the other, he too held a piece of paper. Sure enough, in the upper corner was a drawing of the dwarf bartender. Jayden started to rattle off about the character she was playing, but Strakx waved her off, "Don't tell me. I don't think I want to know. Can you just send me back please?"

Isoroku glanced up again from behind his lighted picture frame, "well ... maybe you could tell us how you managed to get here in the first place?"

Strakx looked at the group with disdain, "That's simple you morons," he turned around to show them the door, but all the only thing behind him was a bookcase, packed with books. The goblin sighed deeply. He walked over to Larry and snatched the paper out of his hand. Walking around the table, he pulled up a chair. "You play me like a jerk," Strakx sneered. "Now, how do you play this stupid game?"