



THE VOICES WITHIN

THE
GOBLIN
WAY



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STORY

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Monte Gazlowe sighed, looking out over a vast mining operation from his spot on a platform above the mine’s South District floor. This was his fifth “fact-finding” tour of the week, and it seemed like he’d been going nonstop for months, taking stock of less-than-desirable working conditions among the goblins. This one was easily among the worst, though Marin Noggenfogger—Gazlowe’s host and guide—acted like everything was aboveboard.

Noggenfogger waved for Gazlowe’s attention, looking out of place in a miraculously unsullied all-white suit that practically gleamed amid the smoky air and rancid, dripping space. It was clear he’d recently taken over this operation. “Over here!” he called. Then he turned to one of his bodyguards for help. “Is the two-shift working the . . . uh . . .”

“Longwall shearer?” Gazlowe offered.

Noggenfogger grinned. “Yeah, what you said. The Rockchomper Three Thousand. Beyootiful piece of machinery, eh?” He beamed more broadly as he gestured down into the enormous mine at a steam-powered behemoth. Its fearsome metal teeth ground relentlessly into the bedrock to get at the vein of iron ore that was the lifeblood of this operation.

“You gotta lean over the railing a little to really get a good look, unless you wanna go down and see it up close,” Noggenfogger added, beckoning Gazlowe to the platform.

Gazlowe stepped closer to the railing, waving off his orc bodyguard, Vak’kan. Unlike some goblins—including Noggenfogger, it seemed—Gazlowe had no fear of heights.

As the shearer brought ground ore to the surface, Gazlowe leaned against the railing to watch workers—mostly goblins and some orcs—operate walking mechs with steam shovels, which loaded ore into mine carts, which would take it to a processing plant. A number of workers had bandages wrapped around their limbs, likely because of the discarded machine parts cluttering the footpaths, and a few let out fits of wet, throaty coughs while clamping soiled rags over their mouths.

Noggenfogger gave Gazlowe a fidgety smile, nodding as if to say, “Nice, eh?”

Gazlowe peered back down—and then a section of the railing detached from its mooring with a screech and swung out, leaving nothing but space between Gazlowe and a deadly fall.

He teetered for a moment before regaining his balance—with the help of Vak’kan, who shot out a beefy hand to grab his collar and haul him swiftly backward.

Gazlowe whipped a glare at Noggenfogger, his pointed ears rigid. Had this been Noggenfogger’s aim? To stage some sort of accident? As newly installed head of the Bilgewater Cartel and de facto representative of his race to the Horde, Gazlowe was aware he had enemies. But he honestly hadn’t thought an attempt on his life would come this soon, let alone be this ham-fisted!

Gazlowe narrowed his eyes. “Look, Noggenfogger, I don’t know what ya think ya know about me, but I don’t die that easy.”

At that, Vak’kan planted himself between Gazlowe and the mine boss, scowling.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, Trade Prince! Look, it’s me, Noggenfogger. I would never do that. In fact, I’m just as shocked as you are!”

For what it was worth, Noggenfogger had gone a deadly shade of pale green—though whether this was from the realization his murderous scheme had failed, or because he

was truly taken by surprise, Gazlowe couldn't say. "Believe me," he said, surveying the platform, "that was an *accident*. This calamitous breach of construction will not go unpunished, let me assure you!"

Vak'kan took a step toward Noggenfogger, cracking his knuckles with a deep grumble, but Gazlowe put out a hand to stay the orc. He had no reason to trust Noggenfogger—in fact, at this point, he knew that he *couldn't*—but he did see that the head of the Steamwheedle Cartel was at least as unnerved as he was.

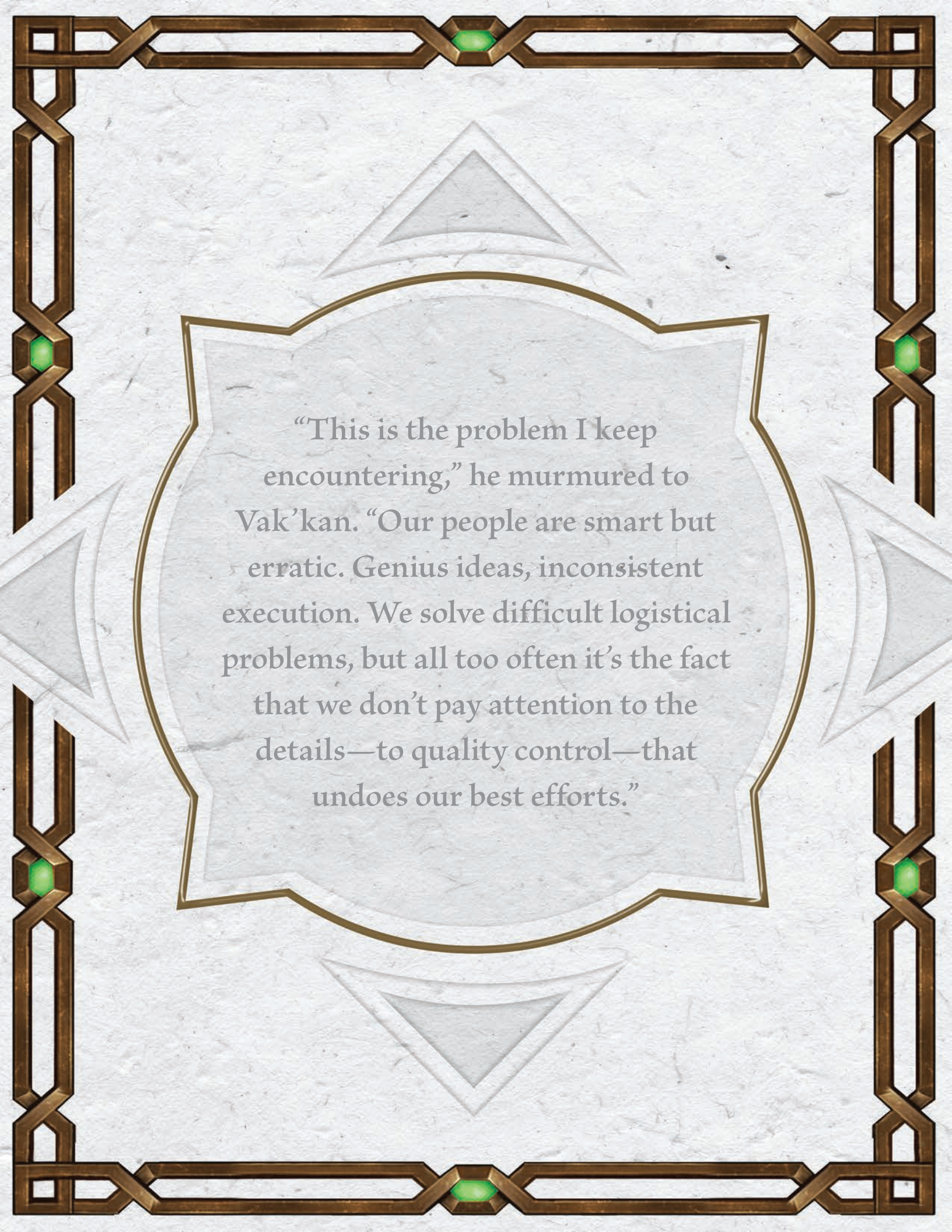
Before the tour, Noggenfogger had made it quite clear he hadn't even wanted Gazlowe down there; while flipping through the financial statements, he'd offered Gazlowe more than one drink (and knowing Noggenfogger's reputation for poisons and elixirs, Gazlowe had repeatedly demurred). He'd only begrudgingly arranged for a brief overview of the operations at Gazlowe's insistence, rambling on about how his time here was limited for the day, what with having a whole other city to run. Ultimately, Gazlowe had used the power of the Horde to strong-arm Noggenfogger into agreeing.

With a practiced eye, Gazlowe ascertained that the platform had been assembled hastily, within the last few days. He ground his teeth together. "This is the problem I keep encountering," he murmured to Vak'kan. "Our people are smart but erratic. Genius ideas, inconsistent execution. We solve difficult logistical problems, but all too often it's the fact that we don't pay attention to the details—to quality control—that undoes our best efforts."

The orc crossed his arms and grunted in agreement.

In the wake of all that had happened since the disappearance of the former "leader" of the Bilgewater Cartel, Jastor Gallywix, Gazlowe had taken pains to inspire the people in his cartel to aim higher and to convince others to do the same. He promoted those who paid attention to detail, who tightened bolts an extra turn and measured twice before they cut. He paid his crew better than anybody else, and the results spoke for themselves. He'd always been known for getting things done, and he'd never disappointed.

He looked over at Noggenfogger. "For now, I'm willin' to believe ya didn't just try to off me. *For now*. So . . . lead on."



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Noggenfogger gave a relieved smile. “Smelting and sluicing’s up ahead, next juncture.”

They walked on toward an opening in the distance, stepping over oily puddles.

“This kinda thing . . .” Gazlowe said, waving one hand to indicate the entirety of the mine. “A lot of the Horde doesn’t respect goblins.”

Noggenfogger blinked his beady gray eyes.

Gazlowe ducked under a sagging support beam. “Some folks think we’re unreliable”—he pointed back toward the broken railing—“greedy”—he fixed Noggenfogger with a pointed look—“disrespectful. That assessment strike you as accurate?”

Truth be told, those prejudices deeply bothered Gazlowe. But before he could tackle the Horde’s opinions, he would first have to change how goblins perceived one another. This mine was a microcosm of a larger problem: rushed jobs, shoddy craftsmanship, poor upkeep, overworking people, and management smiling broadly while siphoning off a fat paycheck.

Noggenfogger barked a bitter laugh. “Like their hands are so clean.” He snorted. “Anyways, we hold our own just fine. Most goblins aren’t even part of the Horde—or the Alliance, for that matter. They value their independence too much.”

As they approached one end of a vast chamber, Noggenfogger began yammering on about how smoothly things were going, praising his own management. “I tell ya, the engineers are always doing . . . engineering stuff. We got explosives guys working explosives. We got drillers, delvers, diggers, and drivers. I started shifts goin’ day and night, and nobody leaves till their quota’s been filled.” He laughed. “Not if they wanna get paid!”

Gazlowe nodded, scoping out the miners. The overseers worked with enthusiasm, shouting threats into bullhorns, but the pace, Gazlowe could see, showed the telltale signs of overwork. Here and there, diggers stopped to lean on their shovels. Gazlowe, one of the best engineers of his generation, could see indications that the steam-powered ore-shearing machine wasn’t operating properly. He could hear a piston misfiring; he could see—and *smell*—the acrid smoke that told him the engine was burning more oil

than it should. An audible rattle suggested that the Rockchomper would need repairs sooner rather than later. And he could see the same issues throughout the cavern. The place was full of death machines and . . . more death machines.

Gazlowe picked his way down a slope crumbling with debris and approached a miner transporting ground ore into a cart with a wheelbarrow, not far from a rocket-powered drill sitting idle, dripping some kind of noxious-smelling goop into the dirt.

The worker spilled his haul and swore.

“Hey, pal. Over here! How’s it goin’?”

The miner wiped a blackened hand across his sweaty brow and rested on his shovel. “Well, to be honest—” he started, but stopped when he saw Noggenfogger peering down at him.

Noggenfogger wore a carefully neutral face. “Go ahead . . .”

“Splitspark.” The miner grimaced. “Sir,” he added hurriedly.

“Splitspark. That’s right. Tell Mr. Gazlowe how it’s goin’ down here.”

The worker glanced at his overseer, whose stony face was an unmistakable warning. “Uh . . . it’s . . . aces! As great as Mr. Noggenfogger! Couldn’t be happier. We’re, uh, movin’ ore like nobody’s business. So . . .” He motioned to the wheelbarrow. “I gotta get back to work. Those quotas ain’t gonna fill themselves.” He busied himself with collecting his spilled haul.

Gazlowe motioned toward a barrel of water. “Sure you don’t wanna rest? A drink?”

Splitspark wiped his perspiring brow, unwittingly showing angry blisters on his hands. “Oh . . . no, I had some water yesterday, thanks.”

Noggenfogger smiled and beckoned Gazlowe away. “Y’see? Hunky-dory. Happy miners, happy engineers, happy drivers, happy drill bits. Happy customers. And my operation is clean!”

Gazlowe glanced at Vak’kan, who’d just blown a loud snort of offense and disgust. “Look, Foggy—”

“Noggenfogger—”

“Yeah, whatever.”

“*Whatever?! Now that’s a goblin bein’ disrespectful. You seem to be forgettin’ I’m leader of the Steamwheedle Cartel, Gazzy.*”

Gazlowe cackled. “And *you* seem to be forgettin’ that I’m Trade Prince of the Bilgewater Cartel. So, lyin’ to my face—is that really how you want to start this relationship?”

Noggenfogger sputtered and his bodyguards started to unsheathe truncheons, but Noggenfogger waved them to halt. “Well, that’s about as much time as I got for today,” he said.

Gazlowe climbed back up the hill of debris to join him. “What say we keep going?”

Noggenfogger bristled for a moment. “*With respect,*” he growled, “I didn’t think you’d be here for so long—and I got meetings and whatnot to tend to in Gadgetzan, so—”

“We’re doin’ this,” Gazlowe assured him with a smile, gesturing for him to continue leading the way. “*With respect,* I’m sure you wouldn’t let Gadgetzan get this bad, wouldja?”

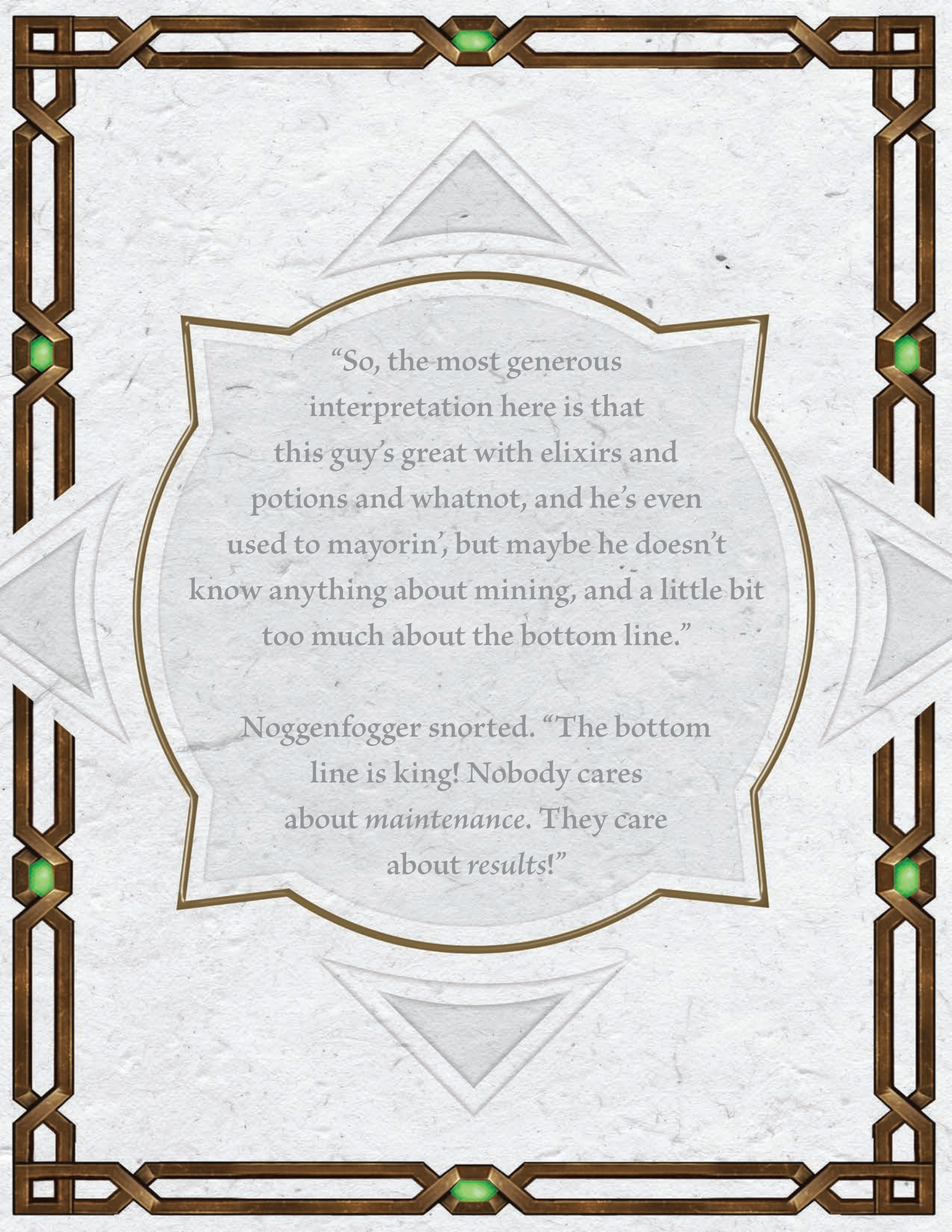
Noggenfogger mumbled and guided Gazlowe farther into the mine, their bodyguards trailing them from a distance.

“I know what you’re tryin’ to sell me here and I’m not buyin’ it,” Gazlowe said, climbing over a collapsed pipe. “What I’m seein’ is your people are overworked and underpaid. Your engineers and tinkers ain’t motivated. Your machines ain’t gettin’ maintained properly. And that’s dangerous.”

Noggenfogger started to object.

Gazlowe raised a finger, then pointed back to where they’d left the shearing machine. “I can hear the bolts rattlin’ on that Rockchomper. So, the most generous interpretation here is that this guy’s great with elixirs and potions and whatnot, and he’s even used to mayorin’, but maybe he doesn’t know anything about mining, and a little bit too much about the bottom line.”

Noggenfogger snorted. “The bottom line is king! Nobody cares about *maintenance*. They care about *results!*”



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Gazlowe grabbed the hand of the nearest worker, revealing the same angry, bandaged wounds he'd seen on Splitspark. "Skipping maintenance impacts results—with your people as much as your machines. How can you expect your engineers to grip a wrench with hands like these?"

"Sure, we get a lotta workers callin' out sick, but that's any job," Noggenfogger countered.

Gazlowe sniffed deeply and felt the rank rasp of oily fumes in his nostrils. "And the air? You *know* it ain't good. You're usin' cheap fuel and rancid oil. You gotta burn cleaner, get the ventilation systems up. And to try and pass this off as a clean outfit? Come on, Foggenniffler."

"*Noggenfogger. Marin Noggenfogger.*" Noggenfogger glared. "And it ain't a lie. I'm clean! Most of that stuff doesn't rise to my level of oversight, so I got plausible deniability of all that mess."

Gazlowe glared back. "That ain't what runnin' a *clean* operation means! *Clean* means you're not pollutin'!"

Noggenfogger's eyes went wide, and he hastened to smooth down his pure-white suit, which had become increasingly wrinkled and stained with greasy droplets. "Oh. Well, then no. The work gives off a natural . . . vapor. What am I supposed to do about that? That's what you call a misunderstanding of frankly confusing terminology."

Gazlowe gestured for Noggenfogger to cross a creaky catwalk first. Noggenfogger hesitated far too long before obliging, then Gazlowe followed. "Look, this ain't just about your bottom line. There's more work we could all have from the Horde—maybe more folks too, if we can run a tighter outfit together. But how am I supposed to talk to a shaman or a druid with your mine belching out this smog? How can we convince clients you're reliable when you got workers out every day with injuries like that?"

"Look, you come in here, you got no idea what I've had to do to get to where I am. You think it's easy schemin' your way into a mayorship? Or the top slot in Steamwheel? The palms I greased? The elixirs I concocted?"

Gazlowe laughed. “That don’t make you special. I rose through the Steamwheedle system just like you. Besides, your rivals and enemies seem to mysteriously go toes-up a lot more than the average.”

“Allegedly,” Noggenfogger corrected.

Gazlowe cocked an eyebrow. “Seriously?”

“Okay, sure, I may be the best alchemist there is,” Noggenfogger backpedaled, “and I got my famous elixir and the occasional pois—I mean, other stuff. But that ain’t the point! I had to compete with the likes of Gallywix and the Venture Company, and now I’m the boss here, so I should get to call the shots! Me—and a lotta other goblins—believe that if I don’t take things this far, I’ll be replaced—or worse! Besides, I didn’t see anyone makin’ *Gallywix* clean up *his* act. No one stops the Venture Company. But *I’m* the bad guy?”

Gazlowe paused. “I know you know what happened to Gallywix.”

“I know he had to split. But he’s got nothin’ to do with Steamwheedle *or* this mine.”

“You had occasion to deal with him, runnin’ Gadgetzan?”

“Yeah, he was a bastard. I hated his guts—but I respected how he did business.”

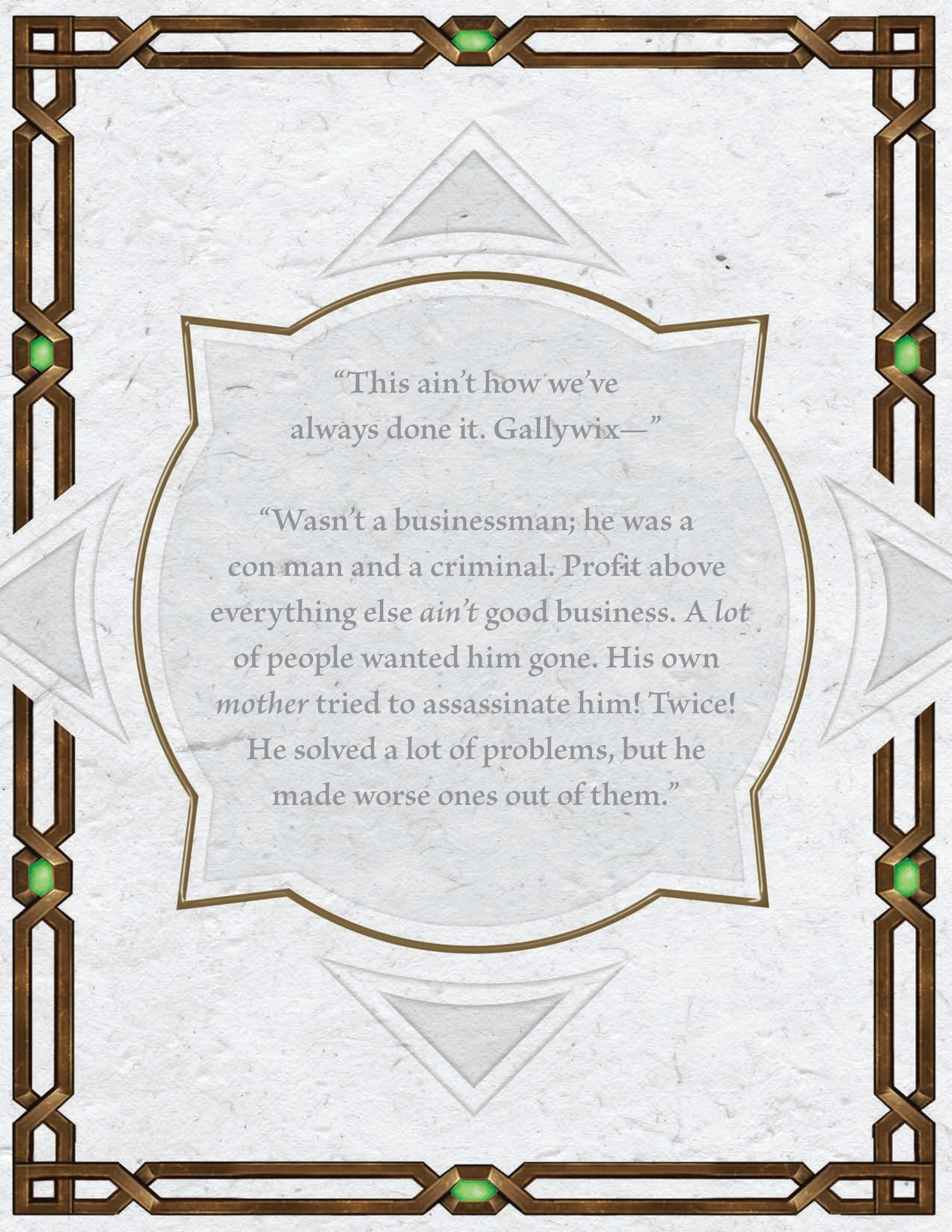
“Did you? Did you respect how he took advantage of his own people and put ’em to work in his mines, after taking everything they owned in exchange for transport away from Mount Kajaro when it was erupting during the Cataclysm?”

“I mean, yeah, harsh. But that’s dedication to profit.”

“That what’s goin’ on here? Allow me to explain somethin’. Havin’ injured and sick workers using poorly maintained machinery eats into the bottom line. It’s short-term gain for long-term loss. Fixin’ your tools now, havin’ happy, healthy employees now, is an investment—and a damn good one.”

“This ain’t how we’ve always done it. Gallywix—”

“Wasn’t a businessman; he was a con man and a criminal. Profit above everything else *ain’t* good business. A *lot* of people wanted him gone. His own *mother* tried to assassinate him! Twice! He solved a lot of problems, but he made worse ones out of them.



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He got stuff done, but he wrecked more. I asked him once if it bothered him, taking advantage of those refugees and working his own people to the bone. Y'know what he said? *It's the goblin way! Supply and demand! Deal with it!*"

Noggenfogger shrugged. "That *is* the goblin way, right?"

"No, it ain't. That was *Gallywix's* way. The goblin way is invention, innovation, partnership. Those things cost a lot, but they earn a lot for every goblin, not just a few," Gazlowe said. "I swear you're missin' my point on purpose. Supply and demand is one way to do things. But we can't only be thinkin' of just ourselves no more. The world is changing."

"There's nothin' wrong with how I run this mine," Noggenfogger protested. "Maybe it's no day at the spa, but production is up ever since I took over."

Noggenfogger's attitude put Gazlowe in mind of another goblin leader he had hoped to forget, because his legacy was as bad in its own way as Gallywix's. Notorious all over Azeroth for their lumber and mining operations. Which was to say, clear-cutting forests and strip-mining areas, leaving barren scars across the land. And the way they operated their oil rigs was reckless at best. Not to mention their arms-dealing with groups that neither Horde nor Alliance found palatable.

"Heard of Mogul Razdunk?" Gazlowe inquired.

"Of course. Former head of the Venture Company. We modeled this operation on theirs."

Of course you did, Gazlowe thought. "Razdunk was aggressive," he said, "but again, he didn't consider the repercussions of his actions, and it caught up to him. He oversaw the Venture Company through expansion in Mulgore, the Stonetalon Mountains, Kul Tiras, Grizzly Hills, Sholazar Basin, and Stranglethorn. But here's the thing. Everywhere they go for a quick buck, it pisses people off, and folks find a way to fight back, to make it harder and harder for them to do business. Pretty soon, everyone there's attackin' 'em. But they just keep doin' it."

Noggenfogger looked less certain. "That's the market though, right? Business is business."

Gazlowe shook his head. “Business is *personal*. When you wreck someone’s home, that’s personal—and it’s bad for business.”

They had arrived at a sluicetown—a collection of tin shacks that stood hard up against the sluices that ran already-dirty water over the crushed rock to create a slurry that would separate ore from waste. The ore was run to a massive smelting plant, which melted the rock and purified the ore into metal. This was even worse than Gazlowe had expected. The dim lights flickered badly; the air was oily and stale. His eyes burned a little.

Gazlowe wheezed. “You gotta get this place ventilated! The air—you gotta know this ain’t sustainable.”

“*Sustainable?*” Noggenfogger scoffed. “What are you now, a shaman?”

Gazlowe shrugged. “I’ve been called worse by better people. But I’m glad you mentioned it. Part of why I’m here is that the elements themselves have taken offense to stuff like what’s happenin’ here, and what the Venture Company does. I’m hearin’ Azeroth is about out of patience with us, and you—mayor of Gadgetzan, leader of the Steamwheedle Cartel—and yeah, head of this operation—you gotta take your share of responsibility for that.”

Noggenfogger harrumphed.

Gazlowe had seen enough. He gestured, and Noggenfogger led them back into the shearing cavern, where Gazlowe called out to a goblin working a machine.

“Hey, pal! How many times has that machine broke down?”

“This week? Five,” he replied plainly.

“And how much production time has that cost you?”

The goblin resignedly turned his palms skyward.

Gazlowe turned his ire back onto Noggenfogger. “And exactly how many sick days have your *employees* taken because of injury, poor conditions?”

Noggenfogger hesitated. “Well . . .”

“You know about as much about your operation as Razdunk did. He thought he was gonna get rich and become a Trade Prince. What he got was blown up by Gallywix.

Don't worship these jokers," Gazlowe said. "Don't model yourself on them. There are better models. Look at the Horde Council."

Noggenfogger scowled. "How'd you get on the Horde Council anyway, eh? What makes you so special?"

"Nothin'. The difference between me and other Trade Princes is I don't think the world is just here to feed me. I learned a while back, you do better when you don't make it all about you."

Noggenfogger looked put-upon. "So, what—you arrive, tell me what I'm doin' wrong, and then throw me to the wolves to fix it? I get the short end, and you go enjoy tea and crumpets?"

"Meh. I don't much like crumpets. Look, I know we got a steep uphill climb, but if we don't change our business—and I mean for all of us—all the goblins, not the mine, we're gonna get left behind. We need to start liftin' each other up instead of seein' each other as competition. And I'm hopin' that you and I can start together."

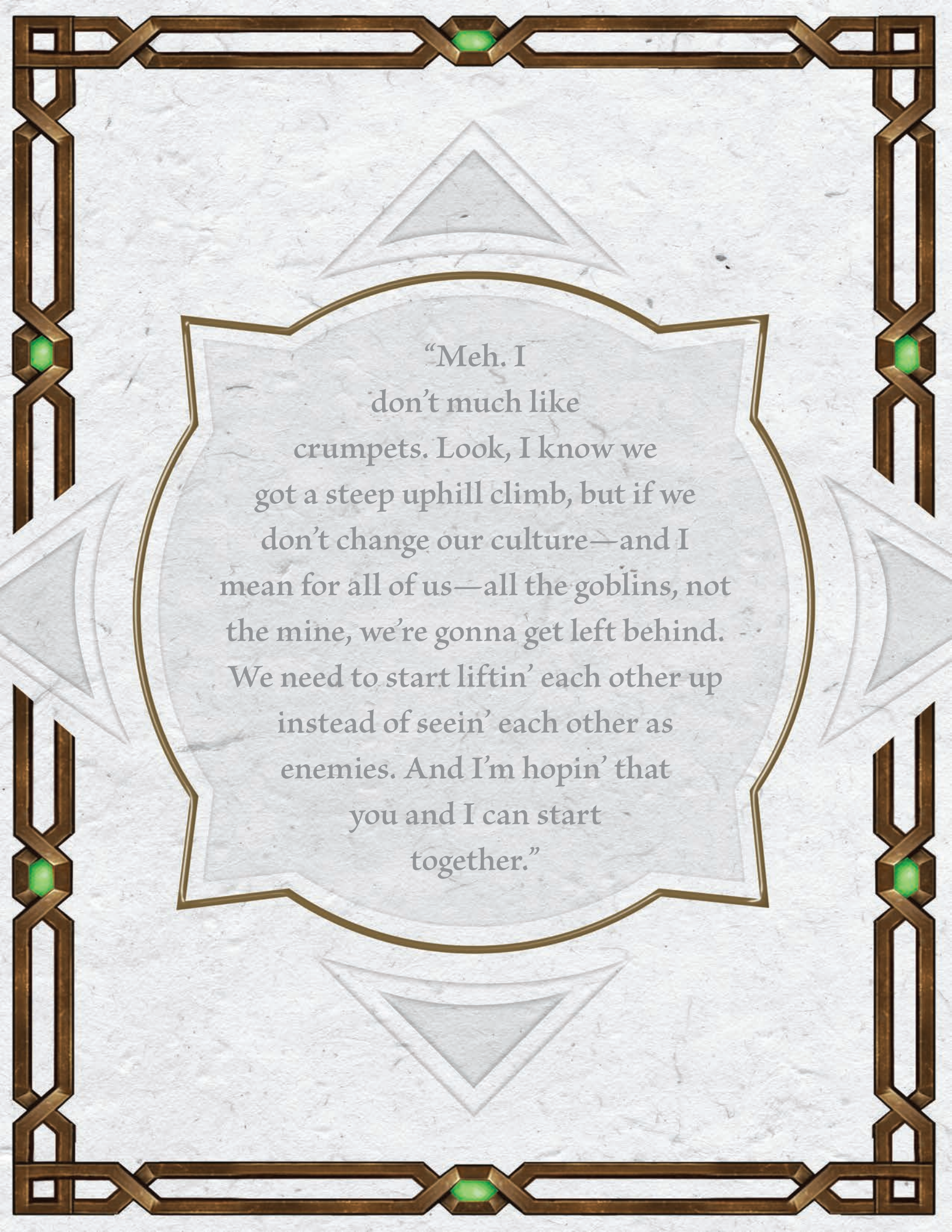
Noggenfogger took a step back. His beady eyes went wide, and then he scowled again, suspicion written all over his sallow face. "Now it makes sense! It's not enough you got the Bilgewater under your thumb, and probably still some of Steamwheel, *and* your pals in the Horde to back your play. You want my little mining operation for yourself! I ask for help, you move in and take over! You're as bad as Gallywix. In fact, you're *worse*! At least he was *honest* about how downright foul he was!"

Gazlowe sighed, pinching the bridge of his long nose. "I don't want the mine. I didn't wanna be head of the Bilgewater Cartel. I didn't wanna have to represent all goblins to the Horde! I mean, between you and me, that's a lotta pressure." He gazed at the whirring shearer wistfully. "I could just be watchin' speedbarge races," he mused.

"Then why'd you take it? There are plenty of goblins who'd kill your whole family for either of those. I'm probably one of 'em."

Gazlowe looked sharply at Noggenfogger, but the mine leader didn't care.

"And you got 'em both," Noggenfogger concluded.

The page features a brown, ornate border with a repeating geometric pattern and four glowing green gemstones at the corners. The background is a light, textured paper. In the center, there is a large, irregularly shaped, light-colored area with a gold border, containing the text. The text is centered and reads:

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together.”

“Some smart guy once said, ‘If somebody really wants to be the boss of everything, under no circumstances should they be allowed to have the job.’” He stared fixedly at Noggenfogger.

Noggenfogger looked abashed. “Because they’re only in it for themselves.”

Gazlowe smiled. “He *can* be taught.”

Noggenfogger snorted. “You can’t tell me you don’t enjoy all that power.”

“Oh, make no mistake, being powerful is better than being powerless. If I wanted to be bigger than Gallywix, I could have that. I’m honestly not interested. But like I said, it’s more about the responsibility. The other reason is, you want somethin’ done, you ask a busy person.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“The council chose me because they knew I get things done. Plus,” Gazlowe added, “they know I’m a goblin of my word—and loyal to the Horde.”

“Big deal. I’ve got loyal friends in the Horde.”

“We both know *that* ain’t true. Even I was sellin’ to both sides for a while, and there’s plenty of goblins who just think gold is gold.”

Noggenfogger smirked. “Well, you can’t spend honor, can you?”

Gazlowe turned away.

Noggenfogger furrowed his brow. “Look, what you’re saying is great, but how I run things here . . . it’s just how it’s done.”

As if on cue, the sound of mechanical grinding filled the air, followed by an explosion. And plenty of shouting. The huge shearing machine’s engine was venting steam, and workers carried injured operators to safety.

Noggenfogger swore, deliberately avoiding Gazlowe’s gaze. “This is gonna hold up production. Hey!” he screamed at the workers. “Back to work! And somebody fix that!”

Tinkers and engineers gathered around the machine, which continued to smoke.

“Head machinist’s out injured,” one worker shouted.

Two other workers lifted blunted and broken tools, exchanging looks of defeat.

Noggenfogger looked on, helpless.

“Whatever else you might be, Noggy,” Gazlowe urged, “you ain’t dense. I think you maybe could turn this place around, and I can *help* you. But you gotta be willing to play nice, and not just with me.”

Noggenfogger looked unmoored. “Our whole system is built on competition, not cooperation. It’s how we solve problems. Survival of the fittest, the cleverest, the most ruthless, the best dealmakers. It’s how we innovate! Why’re you tryin’ to fix what ain’t broken?”

“Oh, it’s broken, and I’m going to show you why. This ain’t the goblin way.”

They headed closer to the blast radius. The bodyguards joined them. As they approached the drilling site, the workers saw them coming and gave way to clear a path. Gazlowe could hear murmurs, and knew the workers were confused that he was there. Heck, they were confused that Noggenfogger was in attendance, if not there to threaten them.

Gazlowe approached several engineers gathered around the open hood of the engine, and Noggenfogger followed. “Alright, what’s goin’ on?”

An older goblin in grease-stained overalls glared. “Don’t get’cher pantaloons in a twi—” He stopped when he realized to whom he was talking. “Oh. Mr. Noggenfogger, sorry. Uh . . . look, this beast is long in the tooth. We been washin’ out filters instead of replacin’ ’em, it’s gunked up, the vibrations take a toll. I mean, we been tightenin’ bolts left and right, but eventually the threads get stripped, and they just won’t hold, the gaskets are kinda shot, and the differential keeps slippin’.”

“This machine alone’s gonna take a fortune to fix. I can’t afford to have this offline for long,” Noggenfogger told Gazlowe. “My clients expect shipments on the regular. This’ll put me behind.”

“If you let me take some of that heat, will you put the work in here?” Gazlowe asked.

Noggenfogger looked grim, but there were no better options before him.

“I’ll give it a shot.”

Gazlowe took a step toward the machine. “Tinker, right? What’s your name?”

“Ollie Spracknozzle. You . . . you’re Mr. Gazlowe.”

“Call me Monte. Yeah, Spracknozzle. You know Skaggit? Used to be head of the tinkers’ union here? He’s one of my crew. Think he’s mentioned you more than once in the positive, Ollie.”

Spracknozzle cracked a grin. “He’s good people.” Then he looked hesitant. “Look, ’scuse my asking, but . . . what are you *doin’* here?”

“We”—Gazlowe gestured to himself and Noggenfogger—“are here to help.”

Ollie screwed up his face. “Uh, no offense, but this is a mechanics thing, not a . . .” he paused, clearly seeking a word that wouldn’t offend. “Big-shot thing. Bosses don’t help. They boss.”

Gazlowe grinned. “Let’s see if we can change that particular perception.”

Noggenfogger was at least savvy enough to grimace noncommittally, so as not to actively antagonize the crowd. His bodyguards and the miners were both on edge.

Still, Gazlowe continued. “As it turns out, Ollie, I happen to be a fair engineer myself. Mind showin’ us the problem?”

The tinker hesitated, clearly not used to deference from bosses, then shrugged, motioning one hand toward the engine.

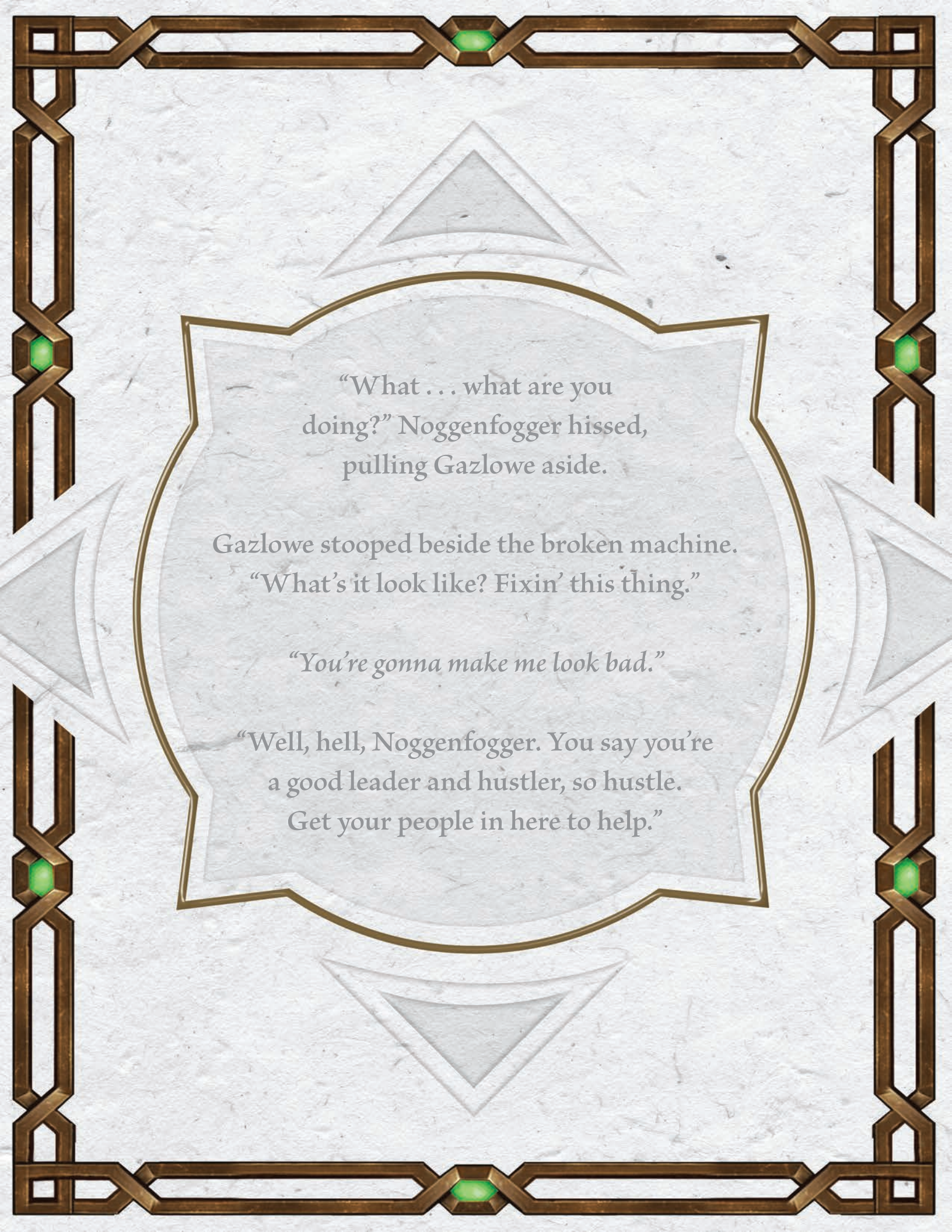
At that, Gazlowe removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. He gestured to Spracknozzle’s tool belt. “I didn’t bring my own, Ollie. You mind?”

“What . . . what are you doing?” Noggenfogger hissed, pulling Gazlowe aside.

Gazlowe stooped beside the broken machine. “What’s it look like? Fixin’ this thing.”

“You’re gonna make me look bad.”

“Well, hell, Noggenfogger. You say you’re a good leader and hustler, so hustle. Get your people in here to help.” Gazlowe paused, an idea taking shape. “In fact, yeah. One of them elixirs of yours, it literally makes people tiny—among other things. Break out whatever stash you got, give it to your tinkers and engineers, and actually get them in there to help me fix it!”



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“Well, hell, Noggenfogger. You say you’re a good leader and hustler, so hustle. Get your people in here to help.”

Noggenfogger gaped. “Sorry—*give* it to them? For *free*?” he hissed under his breath. “The ingredients alone—”

“Big. Picture.” Gazlowe glared at the mine leader, who gritted his teeth, wrestling with the idea.

“*Fffffffine*.” Noggenfogger stomped off.

In the next half hour, Noggenfogger (somewhat reluctantly) returned with a case of his special elixir and gave it to a platoon of (somewhat reluctant) machinists, engineers, and tinkers, who had volunteered to help Gazlowe fix the Rockchomper. They got to work.

Gazlowe was in his element now; under the hood solving a mechanical issue, oblivious to the growing crowd of workers trying to figure out what was going on.

Noggenfogger looked on, tapping his foot, glancing around. He moved alongside Ollie. “Spracknozzle . . . the workers who got hurt—how many?”

“Four, Mr. Noggenfogger.”

“Tell them . . .” Noggenfogger winced, “that, with no admission of culpability, mind you, I’m gonna take care of them. Like medically, I mean. I’ve got somethin’ to make ’em right.”

Ollie looked at Noggenfogger as if he’d spoken gibberish. He opened his mouth to respond but had trouble finding words. “I . . . you . . . that’s . . . that’ll be a load off their minds.”

Noggenfogger nodded.

A gap-toothed grin spread across Ollie’s face. “I’ll let ’em know, sir!”

Noggenfogger took a deep breath, then addressed the crowd. “This may take a while, but don’t worry. We’ll get this fixed as soon as possible. So, you all, uh, take the rest of the day off.” The workers didn’t quite know how to respond. “With pay,” he said with a sigh, and the crowd cheered—even as most of them stayed; there was entertainment value to what was happening now.

Gazlowe, working on the engine, smiled in the darkness of the machine’s underbelly. His plan had worked. “Hey, Noggenfogger,” he called out, “you want to see how to fix one of these things?”

Noggenfogger stooped beside him. “Yeah,” he said, peering into the open engine compartment where the tinkers were gathered around Gazlowe. “I’d appreciate it.”

Gazlowe grinned. Maybe this was going to work even better than he’d thought.

After his team added a greasy solution of one thing, replaced a few stripped gears and cracked bolts and gaskets, as well as doing some preventative maintenance, Gazlowe turned the final screw, stood, and wiped his hands on his pants. “That should do it.” He nodded, and a machinist pulled a lever.

The machine began to rumble and putter before it let out a healthy whir.

Noggenfogger let out a sigh of relief. The workers looked on in a bit of shock and surprise, while those who had helped out from the inside congratulated each other—once the elixir wore off and they regained their size.

Noggenfogger’s bottom lip puckered out as he regarded the empty case of his famous elixir, then he studied Gazlowe warily. “You’re . . . serious. You want to help. Not take over.”

Gazlowe nodded. “Knew you weren’t dense. Though you may want to reconsider wearing white when making your rounds next time.”

Noggenfogger sagged a bit. “Okay, I’ll admit, I could use the help. But you know how tough it is to change things. Could I pay my people more? Some, I guess.”

At that, a few workers within earshot gave him reproachful looks.

“Healthcare? I don’t even know what that looks like, but we could find a place for a clinic or something. Maintenance, I get. But I don’t have enough tinkers as it is, and the ones I got ain’t worth a bucket of warm spit.”

A tinker behind him scowled, mumbling a profanity before stalking off.

Gazlowe shrugged. “Or they’re feeling misused and therefore not giving you their best.”

“And maybe you don’t remember what this is like, Mr. Horde Councilor,” Noggenfogger said, “but I got people around me—people who don’t like profit margins getting eaten into. If I can’t produce, they’ll find someone who can. Can you help with *that*? Besides, if word gets out that I’m goin’ soft, what happens then?”

“Then you got an opportunity to show ’em what’s what.”

Noggenfogger’s nostrils flared. “I’m serious, Gazlowe. You *know* what I’m talkin’ about. Other cartels, other Trade Princes are always just lookin’ for a sign of weakness to pounce—and you know they’d see me doin’ all that—costin’ us money—and go in for the kill!”

Gazlowe took that in. “Okay, you may have a point there.”

“Damn straight I do.”

“What if Steamwheedle had Bilgewater backing your play, takin’ a little heat off you? The two biggest cartels working together? Then you’d be workin’ from a position of strength.”

Noggenfogger weighed the offer—weighed his trust.

“In the meantime,” Gazlowe added, “maybe you could put that big alchemy brain to work on . . . the *opposite* of a poison.”

“What, an antidote?”

Gazlowe snorted. “No, genius. Cures for diseases. Health potions. Medicines.”

“Oh, right. Well, I already got some things in the works. You weren’t thinkin’ for free, were you?”

Gazlowe crossed his arms. “Sure was. But I’d consider it more an investment than a giveaway.”

Noggenfogger cursed under his breath. “Lotta work . . . but yeah. Fine.” His eyes lit up. “Plus, it’s a whole new revenue stream! Ha! Let ’em call me soft then!” He looked at Gazlowe. “You don’t want commission on that, do you . . . ?”

Gazlowe chuckled. “I’ll give you that one for free.”

Noggenfogger nodded, now grateful. “I guess I . . . appreciate you comin’ down here after all.”

Gazlowe regarded Noggenfogger. “Humility is a rare quality in a goblin. Especially in a boss. Tells me you’re not a lost cause.”

Noggenfogger squinted. “I’m not sure whether you just complimented me or insulted me.”

Gazlowe smacked his lips. “What about that drink? While you show me the *real* books.”

Noggenfogger winced. “You saw through that one, eh?”



Gazlowe sipped from his glass of Badlands Bourbon in Noggenfogger’s well-appointed office, which overlooked the mining operations like an aerie. Noggenfogger had opened the ledgers—the real ones this time, he assured Gazlowe—and it was pretty much as Gazlowe had suspected. Grafting, insufficient reinvestment, and skimming from the workers. Standard operating procedure for goblin bigwigs for as long as Gallywix had held the reins. In fact, it wasn’t just Noggenfogger taking a bite out of the profits—other bosses were as well, meaning it could be dangerous for Noggenfogger to rock the boat. If so, he could lose more than money by making it stop.

“I see room for improvement.”

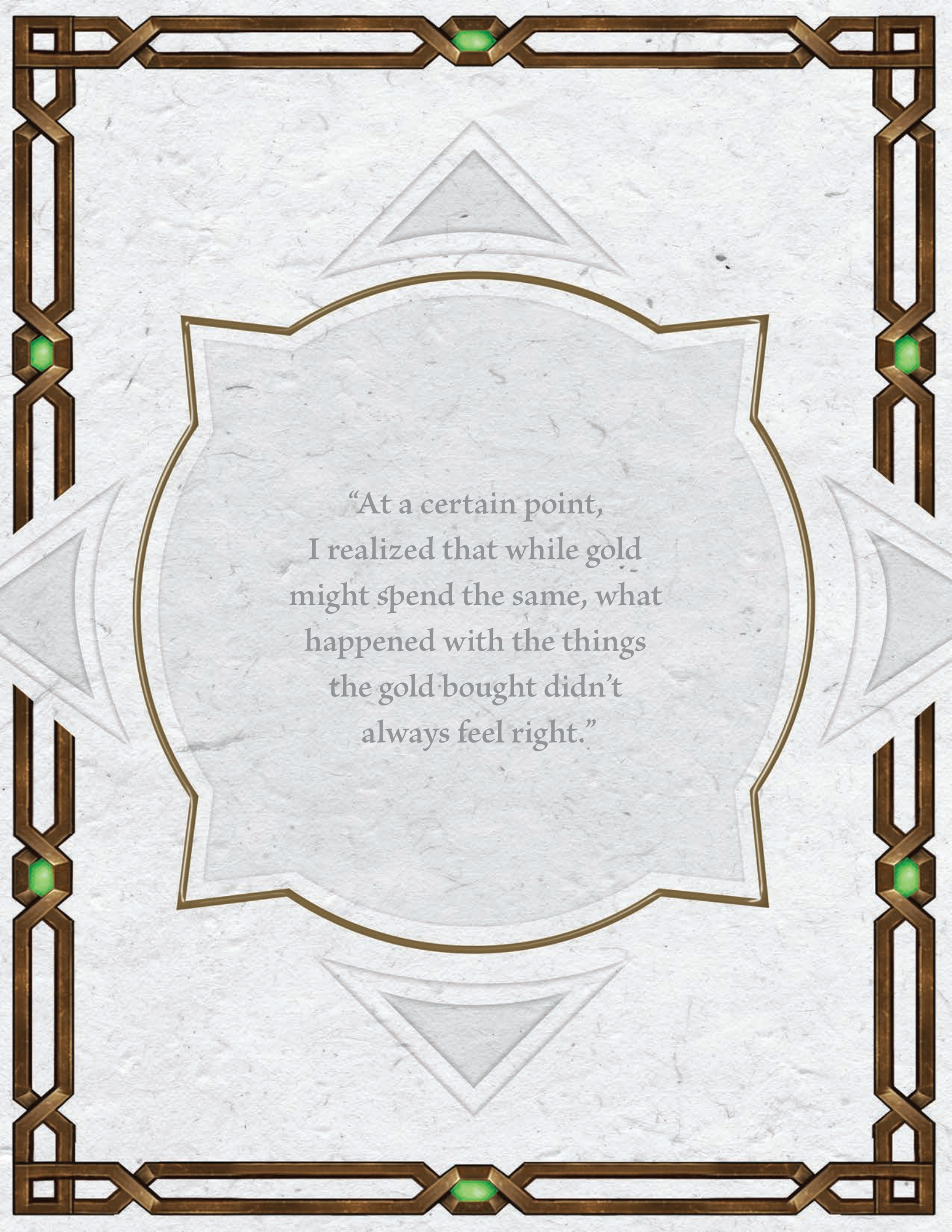
“You see how much I’d need to do?” Noggenfogger leaned back in his armchair. “Even if I play it totally straight, upgrading the machinery, putting all those safety regs in place, healthcare, paying folks more, I’m gonna be in the red in no time. Rebuilding this place? It’s gonna cost a fortune, and it’s not just my profits that’ll be affected. Maybe things are different in the Horde, but the other goblins, even Trade Princes, have others tryin’ to get their cut, and everyone who gets a cut will be looking to get things back to the old way.”

Gazlowe sipped his drink.

“Like I said, I got a reputation as someone who gets things done where the Horde is concerned.”

Noggenfogger rapped his long nails on the wood desk. “Thought you sold to both sides.”

“At a certain point, I realized that while gold might spend the same, what happened with the things the gold bought didn’t always feel right. Somethin’ changed in me after Garrosh was defeated, and I got summoned to repair the damage he left behind in Orgrimmar. You been?”



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Noggenfogger shook his head.

Gazlowe continued. “I was chief engineer there for a while before I started up Ratchet for Steamwheedle. Thrall himself asked me to survey the damage. You’ve met Thrall, right?”

“Thrall the Warchief?”

“He’s not Warchief no more.”

Noggenfogger grimaced. “I’ve seen him from a distance once or twice.”

“The guy’s larger than life. Not that I’d ever tell him this, but I was still a little in awe. I’ve seen plenty of leaders who ruled by violence and fear. Or by outmaneuvering their opponents and their friends. Seen leaders who ruled through moral arm-twisting. But Thrall . . . he’s different. He’s . . . decent.”

Noggenfogger cocked a skeptical, bushy eyebrow. “I mean, not for nothin’, but he named the city after his best friend. He named the *continent* after his *dad*.”

Gazlowe considered that. “Okay, fair point. But they had to name things *something*. Anyway, Thrall could have been Warchief as long as he wanted. He coulda ruled the Horde, and maybe the world. But he never seemed to want it. And he’s so . . . *earnest*.”

Noggenfogger gestured impatiently. “So, he brought you in, gave you the five-copper tour . . .”

“And the place was a mess. But between all that destruction, I noticed Thrall greeting people by name. Hundreds of people. Somehow, he knew the names of folks so far beneath his station that they shoulda been invisible. The big guy just radiated . . . compassion? Empathy? Whatever it was, I’d never encountered it from anyone before. And everywhere he went, these people who’d had their homes, their lives, everything destroyed—they trusted him to help set it right. That trust . . . it was something I didn’t see enough of between our people.

“We finish the tour—the Drag, the bank, the Valley of Strength, a zeppelin tower—and he asks me how much it’ll cost to rebuild it all—better than it was,” Gazlowe concluded. “Now, I realize he’s in a bind, and he came to me because, well, I’m the best.

Plus, I've helped out before. He trusts me."

"You had him over a barrel."

"That's one way to look at it. Thing is, the way I want to do it—mixing materials, building stronger and whatnot—means more labor, more machines, higher shipping costs, and so on. And I gotta make a profit too; I got mouths to feed. So, I give Thrall my bid for the gig. You shoulda seen his face."

"Didn't go for it?"

"He was . . . set back on his heels. Hard. But I explained what needed done, and he agreed to convince the Horde."

Noggenfogger flashed his teeth. "Heh. Sucker."

"The point"—Gazlowe rubbed his forehead, frustrated—"is he treated me as an expert, a master of my craft. I named the figure, and even though he was unhappy about it, he didn't haggle or argue me down. He showed me *respect*. The leader of the whole freakin' Horde."

"I guess that's hard to come by."

"It is exceedingly rare, my friend, and hard-earned."

"But you and your crew at least gave 'em their money's worth."

Gazlowe gazed at Noggenfogger, who now seemed even more receptive to the message he needed to convey than he had seemed earlier. "I'm gonna tell you somethin' I've never told anyone before," he said, leaning in.

Noggenfogger leaned in as well.

"This is where big-picture thinkin' comes in," Gazlowe explained. "Since he showed me respect, he made me want to earn *his* respect. What I understood at that moment was, Thrall would do anything for his people. And I was gonna do everything in my power to make sure that my people did the best work we'd ever done. That's what he does; you get to know him, and he makes you want to live up to his standards."

"Unlike Gallywix."

“Well, like I said, Gallywix was a sociopath. He offered to do it cheaper, but no. Thrall came to me.”

“So, what’d you do?”

Gazlowe made Noggenfogger wait for it. “I dropped my price for him.”

Noggenfogger stared, then shook his head.

Gazlowe chuckled. “You shoulda seen his face *then*. Like it didn’t compute that a goblin’s first, last, and only thought wasn’t just filthy lucre.”

“You tellin’ me you didn’t make bank on that job?”

“Oh, I made a profit. Just not as much as I could’ve. Point is, it made the Warchief respect me *more*—and I assume he didn’t keep it to himself. I’m hopin’ it was the first step to changin’ how everyone else in the Horde sees us—and maybe how we start lookin’ at ourselves.”

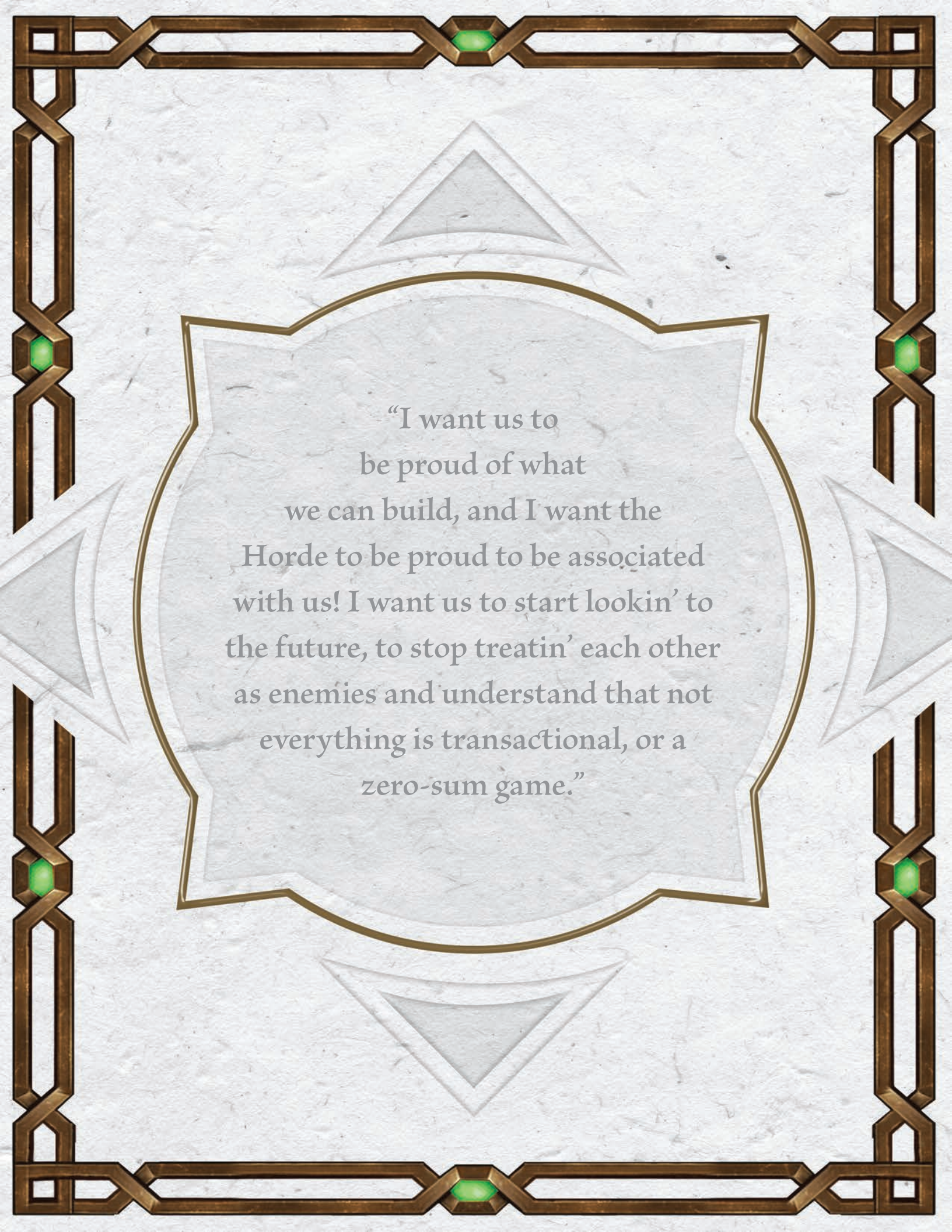
He pointed down at the repaired shearing machine. “That accident down there? There was an accident when we were rebuilding too. Folks from all the races of the Horde pitched in to help and get things back on track. Everyone and everything was taken care of.

“Seein’ that changed how I looked at the world and what I wanted out of it—to be part of something bigger than outdoing the guy next to me,” Gazlowe continued. “My whole crew will tell you we were proud of the job we did, and we were even prouder that we did it for the Horde.” He tipped his glass to Noggenfogger. “Now I want to share that with you.”

Noggenfogger frowned. “You want me to be proud of being a goblin?”

“I want *all* of us”—Gazlowe waved his hand to indicate all goblins in general—“to be proud of bein’ goblins. I want us to be proud of what we can build, and I want the Horde to be proud to be associated with us! I want us to start lookin’ to the future, to stop treatin’ each other as enemies and understand that not everything is transactional, or a zero-sum game.” He leaned back and put up his feet. “What we did back there at the site? Didja see how that mattered?”

“Yes. No. I don’t know. How?”



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Gazlowe gave a genial smile. “Because nothing changes the atmosphere—nothin’ gains your people’s respect—like a boss who wants to help and is willin’ to learn and compromise. It’ll move mountains.”

Noggenfogger squinted at Gazlowe. “I just . . . still can’t figure out your angle.”

“No angle, buddy. If we don’t start helpin’ each other, we’re gonna tear each other apart until there’s nothing left of us.”

Noggenfogger didn’t argue now; he looked as introspective as he was ever going to look. At that, he raised his glass. “To a new way.”

“To a new way.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANDREW ROBINSON is a prolific animation writer and creator who has worked for companies like Marvel, WB, Hasbro, Cartoon Network, Sony, and others on IP like Transformers, Spider-Man, Avengers, Young Justice, G.I. Joe, and more. Since joining Blizzard Entertainment in 2014, he has written animated shorts, songs, world-building lore, comics, and short stories for all their games, and is eager to bring Blizzard's fans more.