

A Ruckus in Ratchet

by Runk "Arot" Stonefist, Grobbulus - 2020

She was the most beautiful troll he had ever seen. Long blue hair. Radiant green skin. A smile full of mischief, and two polished, delicate tusks without a single fleck of pork. She was amazing! Arot sat in the inn and watched her as he drank his grog.

He had come to the Crossroads two days ago to help the clan with their war drive and had spent the better part of those two days in the inn. The way he saw it, there was nothing better than drinking grog and watching this gorgeous troll. Currently the sun was flashing off the dagger she wore at her hip. Arot idly wondered if she knew how to use it. He preferred to think that she did.

"Her name is Ariele."

"What?" Arot shifted his gaze away from the troll and found the innkeeper towering over him.

"Her name is Ariele, greenskin," Boorand Plainswind was an imposing sort of Tauren. More so than usual. His hide was covered in odd scars and random markings. Various trinkets rattled about in his many piercings as he moved. He took Arot's drink and replaced it with a full cup.

"Ariele?" Arot focused on Boorand. "Where she come from?"

Boorand sighed. "Not sure really. She showed up at the inn a fortnight ago and asked for a job. I just happened to be short a server after that nasty business with the dwarf invasion up from the port last month. I hired her." Boorand shrugged and went back to dealing with patrons.

"Maybe you should try and kiss her," a dedder sitting nearby hissed.

"Kiss her?" Arot was having a hard time keeping track of all this talk. He wanted to focus on the troll. Ariele. That was her name. He logged this away in his besotted memory.

"Aye, orc! Give her a kiss!" The dead man cackled and exchanged a merry look with his fellows.

"Yes! A kiss!" Another dedder echoed.

"Barmaid! A kiss for the orc!" The undead laughed and the sound grated on Arot's ears.

Ariele looked up from where she was tapping another keg, "What's all this?" She finished and walked over to the group of undead. Arot was fascinated by the way she moved.

"He wants to kiss you!"

"Aye! A kiss for an old orc!"

"Look at him pining over you!" The dedders collapsed in raucous laughter.

Ariele smiled and glanced at Arot. The old orc sat in a hammock, swaying gently with a cup of grog in one beefy hand and a foolish grin on his face.

"What's your name, orc?" Ariel poured some grog into a cup and replaced Arot's full cup with another full cup to get the orc's attention.

Arot blinked, "Uhhh...Arot."

"Well Arot, I hear rumors that you're looking for a kiss?"

Arot grinned stupidly and said the first thing that came to his mind, "Rocks. Rocks are really good ter fite with!"

Ariele chuckled. Bar patrons hit on her all the time but this one was actually cute. Cute and drunk. "Tell you what, Arot the rock orc. You bring me the beard of a dwarf within the week and I'll give you that kiss!" That would be the end of it. Even if he remembered his quest after he sobered up the chances of him actually bringing a dwarf beard back to the inn in a week were small. Ariele figured her kisses were safe. If not, well, he was still cute. "You got that, sailor? One dwarf beard. One week. One kiss!"

Arot blinked and stood up, "Kiss a sailor? Fer rocks?"

The undead that had been hanging on every word of the exchange burst into more hideous laughter, "No you thick headed orc! She's going to give you a kiss!"

Arot turned his drunken glance to the dedders, "She will?"

"Aye thick head! All you got to do is bring her a dwarf beard! Fair exchange!"

Arot turned back to Ariele, “A kiss?”

“Yes indeed! Go get me some dwarf beard, you grog-muddled kodo!” Ariele grinned at the dedders and set about clearing their drinks, “He is cute after all!”

The undead roared with laughter.

Arot stumbled forward and Ariele deftly turned and set him upright, pointing him in the direction of the door. “Off you go, you cute orc! Make me proud!” She gave him a gentle shove to get him moving. Arot grinned at her and promptly fell over on the floor unconscious.

The breeze was hot but smelled of the sea. Arot sat on his worg and stared out at the arid Barrens. Fletch, his warcat, padded about in the tall grass by the side of the road swatting idly at grasshoppers.

Two days ago, the troll of his dreams had given him a quest and promised him a kiss. All he had to do was bring her the beard of a dwarf within the week. The exact event was jumbled in his memory but that one shining promise was strong. It had stuck in his head when he woke up the following day in the bushes outside the Inn and it had stayed with him as he had spit the previous days grog out. It had carried him through the ensuing hangover and leaving the Crossroads, and it remained in his head a day’s ride out. It occupied his mind as he focused on the petroglyphs marked on the large rock in front of him. Kodo? Had she called him a kodo? What did it mean when a troll called you a kodo?

Just over the horizon to the east, sunlight glinted off blue water. That way was the ocean and the goblin port of Ratchet. The breeze was fresh even this far up the slope into the Barrens. Another few hours would bring Arot there and then what? He had only the vaguest notion of what to do next. He knew dwarves frequented the port, usually pirates, but dwarves all the same. The important part was they all had beards.

Arot checked his gear. Quiver. Bow. Pike. Check. Arots. Rocks. Grog. Check. He was ready enough. “Come on Fletch,” Arot called his warcat, “we gots dorfs ter ketch!”

Fletch growled deep in his throat and joined his master, bounding gracefully after Arot. Together they rode down the road towards the sea.

Innkeeper Wiley knew that time was money. Customers took time and customers had money. It all worked out. That had been the thinking behind his purchase of the Broken Keel Tavern long ago after he retired and gave up drunken pirating. These days he pirated drunken pirates. Much easier and took less time. It was a good deal!

If there was one thing Wiley liked it was a good deal, so it was with some trepidation that Wiley greeted the large, angry orc that appeared in his doorway as the sun set. Large, angry orcs were not usually a good deal. Especially when large, angry orcs wore the colors of the Blacktooth Grin. Wiley knew that outfit. Bunch of bloodthirsty hooligans with a knack for violent diplomacy. Supposedly they were outlaws among the orcs or something like that. Wiley didn’t care as long as they paid their tab. This Blacktooth Grin, however, didn’t look like the tab-paying type.

“Greetings friend!” Wiley kept his opinions to himself. “Welcome to the sign of the Broken Keel! What can I get you tonight?”

“Dorfs! Beard! Kiss!” Arot was in a hurry and diplomacy was not his strong suit.

“What? Look pal if you’re here to start trouble...” Wiley looked past Arot to see if there were any guards about.

“No trubel Goblin! Get me dorf!” Arot’s business philosophy was a direct one. He grabbed the Goblin in front of him and lifted him into the air. “Dorf! Now!”

Wiley squeaked terrified, “Guards! For the love of all that is shiny! Guards!”

From the back of the tavern came a shout and a yell in drunken Common, “What in the seven tablets? Unhand the provider of our beer!” A group of dwarves stumbled forward out of the shadows, tankards in hand and beards a-wagging.

The ensuing melee was short but fierce. Innkeeper Wiley went flying as Arot released him in an upward direction. The dwarves tackled Arot. Arot tackled them back. Punches were thrown. Kicking was ubiquitous. There might have been some biting. All participants were drunk. There was nothing coordinated or graceful about it, but soon several dwarves lay scattered about unconscious. The remainder

wrestled an enraged Arot out the door, while Innkeeper Wiley blessed the festivities with some extremely creative Goblin cursing. That's when Arot yelled out, "Now! Fletch now!" and all hell broke loose.

It has often been said that out of small things come great things, and although Arot was not the smartest orc, he did understand this concept -especially when it came to rocks. He had arrived in Ratchet the night before and had spent the entire day up in the hills above the port sizing up the situation. In particular he had carefully studied a large skree field more or less directly above the inn. It was perfect. It took little effort to set the rocks and boulders where he needed them. The most difficult part of the plan had been getting his warcat to understand the intricacies involved. Fletch understood pawing at pebbles. What he didn't understand was pawing at pebbles in the right direction when called upon. In the end Arot had to merge minds with his warcat and walk him through the procedure. Fletch got it enough that when Arot yelled "Now!" Fletch knew he had to paw a few pebbles down the skree field. This worked exactly as intended.

A few pebbles quickly became more pebbles. More pebbles quickly became many pebbles. Then stones. Then boulders. The drunken dwarves stood stunned as the landslide came down the hills straight at the inn. Innkeeper Wiley fled, too terrified to even curse. And Arot? Arot scooped up the nearest stunned dwarf and fled after the goblin. The ground shook. The sound was deafening. Dwarves and goblins and pirates alike jumped, and ran, and yelled as the rocks and boulders fell onto the inn and scattered across the port. An enormous cloud of dust settled across the town as stray rocks went flying, intent on fulfilling their own obligation to physics. When it was all over the remaining goblins and pirates came out and found a port in ruins. Innkeeper Wiley stood in the middle of it all, covered in dust and cursing about orcs, and dwarves, and the Blacktooth Grin.

Arot sped up the road out of the port on his worg, Fletch at his side, and a terrified dwarf bound and hog-tied across his saddle.

It was with no little surprise that five days after she had set her cute, drunken orc on a quest for a kiss, Ariele watched wide eyed as that same cute, drunken orc strode into the inn at the Crossroads bearing an angry, terrified, cursing dwarf across his shoulders.

Setting the dwarf down in front of her Arot grinned and said simply, "Dorf. He has beard! Kiss?"

As the inn erupted in cheers, and laughter, and chants of "Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!" Ariele got a stool to plant her fiercest, most passionate kiss squarely between the tusks of her cute orc. Together they spent the next hour drinking, and celebrating, and shaving the unfortunate dwarf's beard clean off. It was hung in the bar as a trophy and the dwarf was sent running beardless through the streets of the Crossroads. He was never heard from again. It is assumed he grew his beard back.

The Steamwheedle Cartel repaired the port of Ratchet and put out a bounty on the head of the large, angry orc that brought the hills down on the town. No one seemed to know his name, however, only that he was an orc of the Blacktooth Grin. Vague posters of a large, angry green orc in Grin colors were posted wherever the Cartel did business. Goblin engineers were dispatched to study the geologic dangers of other Cartel properties, without much success, since goblin explosive technology is good for mitigating the danger of landslides by causing landslides. The Steamwheedle Cartel is still working the losses off the books.

As for Fletch? To this day he paws at pebbles on the ground and cannot understand why none of them cause a landslide.