

The Magical Worker's Uprising at the North Pole

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This silly but also fairly dark story is basically a recap of a Fate Core game we played about an Elfish uprising at the North Pole. Don't blame me. . . at least, blame the players a bit too. Thanks to Stephen Webber and Nick Daly for participating.

Peregrine Greyfeather started his morning routine the way he always did, by freshly grinding some cocoa beans, boiling hot water, and making a nice french press of hot cocoa. He fried an egg, hummed to himself, scooped some hot gruel out of the rice cooker, put the egg on top of the gruel, and sat down to eat. He liked mornings; they were predictable, and the one time of the day he could get some real thinking in to himself and feel at peace.

He thought about a few things. There had been some odd stuff going on about town lately; some elves in fancy suits had been walking around staring at property and taking notes. Most of the elves didn't seem to realize what was going on; Peregrine didn't know totally either, but he had a better idea than most of his cotton-brained neighbors. Their elfen town didn't get many visitors really; most people were not able to detect where the town was thanks to a magical misdirecting shield placed over the village, a village called, boringly, Elfsville. Elfsville was something not unlike Hershey, Pennsylvania in the United States: a town built entirely around a single industry. This town didn't produce chocolate (though it did import it heavily); instead, Elfsville was entirely built around one major source of employment: Santa's workshop.

And no, those elves didn't belong to the village. Most of his neighbors couldn't possibly realize it, happy to live in their ignorance as they were. But Peregrine wasn't like them. He read, he liked to study things. And he knew who those elves were: they were the High Elves: an industrious, "high society" set of elves who had broken off to form their own village. They believed themselves to be pure of blood; in reality, it just meant that they were somewhat inbred. But they were rich, and they did place a value on

education, mostly because it meant getting richer and allowing themselves to set themselves further apart from Elfsville, which they liked to call the "wrong side of the Arctic Express".

Peregrine didn't care for them much. Too stuffy. He did sometimes imagine he could better socialize with some book learned people though. He had an awfully hard time fitting in here. He sipped his cocoa again. Peregrine didn't talk to many people at work; his only other attempts at socialization were mostly sad attempts at picking up women at the local juice bar. It never seemed to work, but he kept trying. This topic made Peregrine sad, so he decided to move on to thinking about happier things.

Peregrine thought about his coworkers, and how much he hated them. At some point, he thought, he'd like to make them suffer the way they made him suffer. He grinned and sucked hot cocoa through his teeth.

But little did he know, today he'd take part in a day that would involve more suffering of his coworkers than he could ever imagine, but the end result would be an elfen revolution. And he'd play a major role... but not in the way he'd have expected. Peregrine Greyfeather would do what he never thought he would ever do for his coworkers: he'd become a local hero and save their lives. Well, most of them anyway.

When Peregrine got to work he beelined directly to his building. He didn't work in the main factory, but in a building off to the right. Directly past the reindeer shed, slightly out of view: the Pixie Refinery and Distillery. Everyone knows that Santa's workshop is powered by pixie dust. But where does pixie dust come from? The answer of course is pixies. Pixies, tiny fairy-like creatures, are grown in a greenhouse-like environment (off to the right of the building Peregrine worked at). When they reach the appropriate point in their lives that the powder on their wings becomes the appropriate level of sparkly and beautiful, they're harvested.

This is where the refinery and distillery came into play. Pixies are componentized into several parts: the wings are ground and processed into pixie dust, the magic substance that powers Santa's lab. The rest of the body of the pixie is ground, strained, and heavily refined to create reindeer kibble (this is, of course, how Santa's reindeer are capable of flight). The rest is waste... a toxic, glowing waste that can burn the skin and creates strange effects for anyone who has to handle it.

Peregrine's job was to get rid of the waste.

It wasn't always that way; Peregrine once was a normal factory worker. Unfortunately, his hatred for all "successful" individuals meant that there was no-one he hated more than the children on Santa's "good list". As

such, he began to poison and insert dangerous, sharp objects into all sorts of children's toys on the good list.

When Santa found out, Peregrine got put on the naughty list. He was put far, far down on the naughty list, about as deep into the naughty category as you could go. And Peregrine was punished about as severely as anyone could be punished in the happy-go-lucky town of Elfsville; he was condemned to pixie sludge handling duty.

Sludge duty at one point had been cycled as a temporary duty that all elves must endure; now Peregrine was the only worker who suffered the job. Years of handling pixie sludge had burned Peregrine terribly. He had terrible deformities, deep burns on his skin that shimmered fabulous colors and either caused him great pain or numbed him completely.

Peregrine had discovered something strange and wonderful though. Years of exposure to the pixie dust had meant that he had found that he had a certain attunement to the toys and other objects that rolled off of Santa's workshop. He could command them to his will. But he didn't tell anyone this secret. He decided to save it... surely it would have some "use" that he could affect his coworkers with some day. Better to keep such surprises till you need them.

Peregrine walked up to the door. Locked! And with a note! This note wasn't one of the usual hand-scrawled happy letters from Santa, attached with an adhesive cookie. No, this was a corporate type and font. Strange. Anyway, it said that all distillery workers were to temporarily forego their regular duties for a meeting in the workshop. Peregrine grumbled. He hated meetings, and thought that at least he had gotten past those at this point.

He walked past the reindeer shed. Reindeer were shackled to the sides of the shed. Most of them were dopes. But he paused in front of one of them. He and Rudolf looked at each other in the eyes. Rudolf, the outcast. Rudolf, whose nose glowed with red power that no-one quite understood, likely a mutation from high exposure to pixie toxins in his kibble. Peregrine liked Rudolf, and Rudolf seemed to like him. He petted Rudolf on the head as he walked by. Rudolf looked at him for a moment in acknowledgment, and then turned to stare off into the distance. Peregrine wondered what Rudolf schemed himself behind that nose which glowed so bright.

Alex Jellypin Pillowpuff was assembled with all the other elves in Santa's factory. It had been a strange morning; he had entered, and things were a little... off? They conveyor belts and machinery were all there, and of course the candy-striped pillars that towered over the factory floor were there. But what happened to the tinsel, the mistletoe, the baubles that decorated the

workshop? They were all gone. Some strange posters had taken their place. One of them showed a reindeer, flying high above the clouds, and it said: "ACCOMPLISHMENT: Fly high to meet your dreams." The poster seemed sterile and a bit odd. He guessed it was supposed to be inspiring?

The door opened in the back and he saw Peregrine Greyfeather enter. A small shiver went down his spine; Peregrine was not well liked in the factory. Alex knew the stories, all the elves did. Peregrine gave him the creeps. . . still, he felt a sort of camaraderie with him, though he wasn't sure totally why. He guessed it was the common bond of being a loner. But Alex's aspect of being a loner wasn't at all like Peregrine's; no, not at all.

Alex had always been shy. He always liked people, and they seemed to like him? But he just didn't know how to speak to them. And it had gotten worse a couple of years ago, after the horrible accident. Alex worked on the sewing line; Santa had complimented him often for his excellent work. But one day he had a terrible accident with the strongest, most industrial sewing machine they had. He didn't like to think of it, but bits of the story flew through his head anyway. The needle, piercing his spine. The excruciating pain. He had serious nerve damage, and could barely move his limbs. He was afraid he would never be able to work again.

Luckily, one of the clever elves from the machine shop came up with an idea; with her help, Alex was fitted with a robotic monkey toy exoskeleton. It was a bit goofy looking, and the strange solution made him even more shy and afraid to talk to his fellow elves. But it did give him amazing, monkey-like agility. When it didn't go on the fritz that is. That barely ever happened though.

Anyway, Peregrine also noticed Alex as he shuffled into the shop. Peregrine didn't like Alex, but he did pity him a little bit. He felt a bit of camaraderie too; they were both workers who had been injured on the job. That at least (perhaps subconsciously) did count for something.

To the back, above, and to the left of the shop was Santa's office, from which he managed paperwork (mostly ongoing evaluations of naughty and nice lists). The door to it opened, and all elfen eyes looked up. Santa walked down the first half of the stairs and a small landing to address the crowd. "Hello my little Elves!" he bellowed merrily. "Hi Santa!" most of the elves said enthusiastically. Santa was well liked generally, he treated his employees well, and. . . well, he had always been there. Peregrine rolled his eyes though. He hated that guy.

Santa was carrying the large red sack over his shoulder he usually used to carry gifts, but instead of his usual red suit, he wore a Hawaiian shirt, some khaki pants, and sunglasses. Behind him strutted three high elves, a

couple of lackey middle manager looking types and one that looked a bit spiffier. There were a few furry white dudes too... two of which looked pretty well built... Yetis! And one in the back which was extra muscular. His hair, normally matted, seemed to have been forced into being tamed for the occasion... combed into place and heavily gelled. Peregrine recognized that guy... wasn't that the Abominable Snowman, multi-year wrestler? But now, just leading a security team for some weaselly high elves... seemed like a low fall. Good for him.

"My dear elves, I have some... well, some mixed news. As you all know, I'm rather old... I've been doing this for a couple thousand years. It's time for me to retire." A gasp raised from the crowd. Even Peregrine was caught off guard a bit. "Now now, you'll always be my children and I care for you dearly... but... it's time to pass things on. Don't worry, I've passed things on to capable hands. I'm sure things will be okay for you." He picked a gold coin out of his sack, tossed it up in the air and caught it. "Anyway, it'll definitely be okay for me. And so, uh... I'm off!" And with that, Santa ran out of the room. The noise of reindeer revving up and taking off was heard outside and a loud "Whooohooo!" slowly passed off into the distance.

The snazziest looking of the high elves stepped forward. "Alright you chumps, enough of this. I'm your new boss... Frederic Greenhollow. Things are gonna change around here... less play, more work. We expect higher returns out of this facility than you've had in the past. No more long nights out at the juice bar, we're locking that down. I expect higher efficiency out of everyone... we'll be pulling metrics reports on each individual's performance, and we expect you to rate you and your colleagues. Those with the lowest performance rating will be fired. Sorry, that's business. Now let's get to work. Move move move!"

Most of the elves were pretty stunned and as such, did not start moving immediately. Frederic grumbled something to the yeti patrol and nodded to his fellow associates. They walked into Santa's office, muttering something about how amazing it was that Santa could have possibly kept this shamble of an operation going for so long.

The yetis began walking down the factory floor, shoving the elves about. "Get to work! You heard the boss! You! Get that machinery rolling!" They began shoving elves left and right, picking up those who were uncooperative and forcing them in front of their stations, bellowing menacingly. Workers began working nervously.

Mr. Abominable made a particularly menacing sweep. Eventually he arrived at Alex, who was particularly shocked and horrified by the unfolding of events. "YOU! Get to work! Start this machine! Sew those bears!" He

growled. But Alex was frozen in place. The lead yeti didn't take kindly to this.

"I said, get to work, now get to work!" he growled, attempting a grab at Alex. But suddenly, Alex's monkey-enhanced reflexes swooped in, and he made a quick dodge. This further enraged Mr. Abominable... he couldn't possibly set a fearsome image if people were evading his grasp. "Smart guy eh? I'll show you..." he said, and raised his arm for another swoop.

While the yeti became enraged, the opposite effect was happening to Alex. All eyes were on him and suddenly he felt... empowered. Wonderful. Important. And if all of this was suddenly very, very significant.

As the yeti prepped for another swoop in, Alex used his monkey maneuvering abilities to dodge under his legs, grabbed his fur from behind, and scuttled up the yeti's back. Shocked, the yeti tried to grab Alex, but failed; his monkey maneuverability was too much.

Suddenly filled with confidence, Alex yelled out to the crowd.

"Citizens! Workers! Have we not worked hard for years? Is this not the fruit of our labor? Do they not pluck at our fruit and eat of it?"

"Get off me, you chump!" growled the yeti. The other two security yetis had caught wind of what was happening and were running over from harassing other elves to try to assist their boss.

"Workers! Cast off your chains! Will you allow these men to come in and enslave you, to take away what you have built... what we have all built under the roof of Santa's factory? This is our factory... and we will take it back!"

And with that, a loud "Hurrah!" was yelled, as elves everywhere across the factory were thrown into a rebellious fury. They began picking up toys off the factory line, tossing them into the air! Several elves began to antagonize the security yetis, making them unable to come to their boss's aid!

The high elves stared out the windows of Santa's office. "What the hell?" murmured Mr. Greenhollow.

Meanwhile, Peregrine looked around. He felt somewhat content... even proud of his elfen workers. Man, they were creating a hell of a disturbance in here. He liked it. But on the other hand, they seemed to be doing a good enough of a job on their own... he wondered if he couldn't find some more unique ways to "aid" the situation in the cafeteria. He sneaked off that way, thinking himself unnoticed by the fury of the crowd.

He was mostly... though one middle manager did briefly look out the window and wonder what the hell that guy was doing? But very quickly it seemed less important than the riot that was erupting in the middle of the factory floor so he instead turned to gawk at that.

"You doofuses!" yelled Frederic Greenhollow at his yetis. "Get those guys under control! What do we pay you for, to dance around like a bunch of clowns?"

At that moment, Alex, who had been riding around on Mr. Abominable's back like a rodeo clown, was suddenly pulled back to reality as the yeti caught him in his grasp.

"Wise guy eh?" growled the enraged yeti. "I'll smash you and your stupid monkey robot to bits yet..." and tossed him across the room.

Alex marveled at what a strong, firm toss it was as he hurtled across the factory floor, a tumble of rioting elves beneath him. But he also marveled at his monkey agility. Instead of colliding with the wall and being crushed, he did a quick save and grabbed on to a passing pipe and swung around. He perched on the pipe and grinned, and begun to scuttle up the wall.

Peregrine bust into the cafeteria. He looked around. The place was, predictably, deserted. The two usual chefs were quickly but nervously preparing lunch. As the doors closed behind him, the sheer volume of the riot crept into the cafeteria for a moment, then closed behind him.

The two lunch workers looked up nervously and curiously. They had been totally cut off from the activities but they had the strict and important duty of preparing the standard elfen lunch... hot cocoa and gruel with fried eggs, which is what most elves ate for at least two if not three meals of the day. That was one thing Peregrine shared with his fellow elves... he could never seem to get tired of that meal.

Both of the lunch workers were fairly elderly, the old man was flipping eggs and stirring gruel, while the old woman was stirring a large cauldron of hot cocoa with a peppermint stick. There was water boiling for another cauldron of hot cocoa, not yet ready though.

"Tell me son, what's going on out there?" said the old woman. There were multiple cauldrons boiling.

Normally, Peregrine's bad reputation would have made them suspicious of conversation with him. At the moment, he was the only source of information, and thus they were hanging on his every word. Plus he was pretty good at being deceptive.

"Oh, you know... just uh, it's taking a bit of getting used to with the new owners of the factory."

The old couple nodded as if they understood, which they didn't.

"Look, uh, so the bosses want their hot cocoa ASAP. They've been negotiating all morning and they said there will be... uh, health inspections soon. So really, honestly, you'd better catch them on their good side."

"Oh yes of course!" they said earnestly, fearing a health inspection, as all cooks do.

"Yes, and uh... so I'll need three cups of hot cocoa immediately." The woman set down three mugs and quickly poured the sweet sticky liquid into them. "And uh... they said they need that peppermint stick too. For inspections."

"This thing?" said the old woman, surprised and confused. She pulled the peppermint stick out of the cocoa... it was gigantic, almost elf-sized. As per elf tradition, all hot cocoa should be stirred with a peppermint stick. And if you've ever done this you know what happens... the tip becomes pointy and sharp. Peregrine grinned to himself. A peppermint spear.

"Yes, yes that. Oh and uh... they said to keep it coming. Nonstop! There's going to be a conference in here, better start boiling as much hot cocoa as you can."

"Right. Right of course!" The old woman put another cauldron on to boil and opened a large vat of powdered cocoa. The air was filled with a dry dust, and everyone let out a bit of a cough. Peregrine wondered how the high elves would react to the cheap stuff. Well, who else is going to bring them drinks at this point?

Peregrine checked his pockets... growing up an insidious prankster, he usually kept on him... did he have it?... yes! Extra strength laxatives! He put one into each cup. As an afterthought he poured the rest of the bottle into the currently bubbling cauldron.

Peregrine slung the peppermint spear over his shoulder, picked up the mugs of cocoa, and sauntered back into the factory floor. Things were a real shitstorm in here now it looked like. The yetis were having a hard time keeping things under control, though for the most part, it was scuffling, not real violence. He walked up the stairs and knocked on the door. "Hey, you guys ordered some hot cocoa?"

Meanwhile, on the far right of the room, Alex had shuffled over to some of the storage shelves where some of the finished toys were ready for shipping. The yetis seemed to be getting tired and more angry with all the scuffling. One of them finally lost it and let a powerful blow fly across the face of one of the elves, and he was knocked down, unconscious. Alex decided it was time to see if he could capitalize on this moment.

"Citizens! Do you not see the violent oppression of the workers of our dear factory? Our oppressors have shown they are not afraid to use force... we cannot hold back any longer... we must tear the slavers down!" A loud "hurrah!" was heard across the floor as things turned into a violent rage.

Flicking another elf off his shoulder, Mr. Abominable signaled to his fellow yetis. "You guys stay here and get these elves under control. I'm going after that monkey over there." He began to run across to the other side of the factory.

Back at the office, one of the high elves opened the door. "Cocoa? Thanks. Wait a minute... didn't I see you just walk off the floor into the other room?"

"Yeah, of course, because your boss sent me," Peregrine said with a serious glower.

"Oh yes... well of course, well... come in already," he said, looking nervously at the swarm of elves outside. Better not leave this door open for too long.

"Who's that?" asked Frederic.

"Uh, he's the guy you sent out for cocoa, Mr. Greenhollow?"

"Oh yes, uh, of course. Thanks." Mr. Greenhollow and his associates all took their mugs of coffee and sipped at it. "Hm. This stuff's not bad. Where's the marshmallows though? No matter."

All of the high elves were staring wide-eyed out the window. Mr. Greenhollow was indignant. He'd never had an acquisition go down like this. What did these low-lives think they were doing? He was also a bit nervous... what would he say to his investors?

"Santa's going to pay for this. He gave us a bum deal, and I bet he knew it..." Mr. Greenhollow grumbled. Peregrine liked the idea of Santa paying for it, anyway.

Greenhollow flicked his phone open. "We can't let this thing drag on like this. We gotta pull out some reinforcements." He barked some orders onto his phone. "Don't worry, the ice men will be here in a few minutes. We'll get this place under control."

One of the guys pointed at Alex. "Who's that monkey? It looks like he's at the heart of this whole operation..."

"Hm," muttered Mr. Greenhollow. "I don't recognize him... but I bet he's on the naughty list... where is that thing?"

At this point Peregrine realized that his cover of hanging out in this room was pretty much doomed no matter what. The naughty list was printed on a long cylinder of paper, and of course his name and photograph were close to the bottom... only one thing to do... he needed to get out of here... and why not take the evidence with him?

Before anyone realized what the hell he was doing, Peregrine grabbed the bottom of the naughty list and jumped out the window. One of the elves

almost grabbed him, but he suddenly realized he had a lot less control over his bowels in this situation than he had believed.

Shoving elves aside by the armful and avoiding tiny toy swords and whatever improvised weapons the elves could come up with, Mr. Abominable finally managed to get to the other end of the factory. Alex, on the shelf high above him, had just opened up the box to see if he could find any improvisational weapons inside. Unfortunately, the box's contents couldn't be more useless... teddy bears, fuzzy pillows and rubber ducks! Come on.

"Get down from there!" growled Mr. Abominable.

"Make me!" said Alex, and dumped the whole box over from overhead. The yeti ducked out of the way.

"Oh I will... I'll pound that wall down if you don't..."

He turned around though at the sound of a large amount of commotion. A elf with some strange, shimmering disfigurements had just jumped out of a window of Santa's office holding some long sheet of what appeared to be some kind of durable paper, the resistance of which allowed him to slide down apparently safely. This, as the reader knows, was of course Peregrine.

Peregrine had a slightly delirious chuckle to himself, amazed that his move worked, as he began to run across the floor of the factory, ducking from factory table to factory table. Man, things were getting really crazy out here. There were a bunch of unconscious elves, and he hopped over the knocked out body of one of the yeti security guards. His original intent was to loop it across some of these pillars in front of the factory, loop around, head to the cafeteria, then set the whole sheet on fire (as a pyromaniac, he always some such equipment with him). Unfortunately, in his manic run, he didn't manage to notice Mr. Abominable until he nearly bumped into him.

"Uh, hello..." said Peregrine.

"You. Are you also responsible for this? Are you conspiring with this guy?"

"Uh, I don't know... am I?"

Mr. Abominable swung at him. Peregrine tried to defend with his peppermint spear, but Mr. Abominable's swing simply broke it in half. Peregrine scrambled for the remaining pointy end, now shaped a bit more like a worn down stub of a pencil. He was glad it wasn't him that was smashed in half.

Meanwhile Alex dropped another box on the yeti's head. This one connected, and appeared to daze him. The box spilled open... more rubber ducks and stuffed animals.

"Augh, I'll kill the both of you!" he yelled. He took another swing at Peregrine with his fists, but dazed by the box that had fallen on his head, his swing missed.

Peregrine decided it was time to put that attunement with the pixie dust to use. He summoned his inner thoughts and... the toys picked themselves off the floor.

"What the hell?" yelled Mr. Abominable as a tiny swarm of stuffed animals and rubber ducks began to crawl all over his body. He tried to pull them off furiously, but there were just too many of them.

Alex looked in the next box. Jackpot. This one had tiny army men and little catapults in them... and some marbles. Oh yes...

While Mr. Abominable was distracted with the toys that covered his body, Peregrine came up with a new use for the naughty list. He began circling Mr. Abominable with it. Mr. Abominable, with tiny stuffed animals all over his body and some even crawling along his face, failed to realize in time the mummification that was happening to his body. He fell over, covered, and seemingly unable to escape the tough paper. Peregrine rolled his body around until he had him in a nice cocoon.

Peregrine looked around. Holy cow, the two yeti security guards were down! And well... so were two thirds of the elves that had been on the factory floor.

The high elves stepped out of their office. "What are you doing? Stop at once! I'll have you all fired! Hell... you're already fired! I'll have you tossed in prison!"

Peregrine decided now might be a nice time to make good use of that "setting things on fire" idea. So he did. He lit the naughty list on fire, which began to spread across the factory floor.

It also caught Mr. Abominable's cocooned body. He burned, screaming and writhing like a tiny incapable mummy. Peregrine was amazed. He also almost felt bad. Nah, not enough time.

Oh shoot, the fire also started to cover some of the bodies of the unconscious elves and the yeti security guards. Some of the still-living elves struggled to try to pull their unconscious friends to safety... and got most of them.

Alex meanwhile had been pretty impressed with the apparent abilities of Peregrine. And it was obvious to him... of course... the pixie contamination! The pixie dust! The terrible, horrible injuries!

He wondered if Peregrine could do some more awesome things with these action figures and catapults. No sense in asking, might as well just add to the situation! He successfully tossed and scattered the toys across the room. He pocketed the marbles though.

The fire spread, and reached the office. The high elves nervously shuffled away from the stairs.

"Citizens!" yelled Alex to the remaining elves. "Look upon your oppressors, look upon what they've done to you! Get them!"

The remaining elves had a quick scuffle with the high elves... it ended quickly. The two middle managers were knocked out, but so were all the worker elves except one. Frederic was unscathed.

"You," he said, turning to the last elf. "You thought you could rise up against me, hm? Look at your friends, do you want the same to happen to you?" The last elf looked in horror and pleaded, oh god, I'm so sorry to have rebelled, and begged not to be sacked from his job.

The fire spread. As the flames licked up various unconscious bodies a roasting smell covered the floor. It began to smell faintly of roasted meat. The cooks walked out of the cafeteria and asked, "Hey, what's going on out here, I thought that we ate food in the... oh my god!"

Alex suddenly realized that he had cornered himself on the ceiling of a burning building... he tried to quietly descend and started wondering where exits might be. Unfortunately around this time, his monkey exoskeleton, which barely ever fails, failed, and he crashed to the floor.

"Where the hell are our reinforcements?" yelled Mr. Greenhollow.

And at that point, the door burst open.

"Freeze, nobody move! Or we'll ice you!" yelled a team of ten of the snowman hit squad. They pointed their dry-ice firing guns in all directions.

"Oh god damnit," said the one in front, looking at the fire.

"Gentlemen!" cried Mr. Greenhollow. "These two individuals have started this ruckus! Do them in at once!"

Alex surveyed his situation and decided there was no way they could do good in here. But how could they get to the cafeteria? The old folks and Mr. Greenhollow were at the door...

"Mr. and Mrs... cafeteria people. This man has done us in! Look at what he has done to all of us! Your fellow workers! He intends to kill us! Defend us!"

The cafeteria people looked around nervously, then raised their weapons... the old man held a frying pan, and the old woman held... well, a ladle. Caught up in the insanity of the moment, and roused by they didn't even know what, they looked to strike down the foreigner, but...

Mr. Greenhollow swung with an investor's rage. The fury of being taken out by these nitwits... imagining this whole thing going up in smoke... it was all too much. He swung quickly at the old couple and knocked them to the ground.

The remaining worker elf, not sure whose side he was on at all anymore, snuck out into the cafeteria.

"Hey my arm's melting," said the snowman in the front of the squad. They backed off a bit more. The gun fell out of his hand.

"You doofuses! Fire at them! Or fine... I'll do it myself!" And with that, Mr. Greenhollow pulled what appeared to be an executive pen from his pocket, and removed the tip... there was a small blade inside. He tossed the tiny, golden knife at Peregrine... and struck him in the arm.

Peregrine looked down. There was a knife lodged in his arm... but luckily it hit him in one of his injuries that he was completely numb to. A wound opened, and pixie toxins trickled onto the floor.

"Hey, uh, is this stuff flammable?" asked Alex.

"Yeah, extremely. Why?" answered Peregrine.

"Oh, uh.. because this." He pulled the marbles from his pocket, rolled them in the pixie toxins, and passed them over and across the firewall. They passed through the fire, and as they did, morphed into enormous fireballs.

"Dang," said the lead snowman, just before a large fireball melted through his face. The cascade of fireballs tore through the snowmen, leaving tiny puddles behind.

Just a moment before, Frederic Greenhollow had madness in his eyes. A complete and total loss. On the very day of acquisition! But as the snowmen melted, so did his courage. He looked across the burning factory, realizing that these two elves had undone everything about this place, and so too would they undo him.

And that's when he became a gibbering buffoon.

"Oh, uh, hey, uh... oh shit."

Peregrine Greyfeather and Alex Jellypin Pillowpuff closed in.

"Hey, uh... we can talk about this right? What... what do you guys want? Do you want... promotions?"

Silhouetted against a burning factory, they continued to walk closer.

"Uh, the factory? Do you want to run the factory?"

They inched in closer.

"Look... you and I... we have some things... I'm not too far off! Don't tell anyone... my father was like you you know! Came from lower blood... pulled himself up by his bootstraps! You can aspire to great things too!"

Mr. Greenhollow realized that he probably just dug himself deeper. He turned, tried to run to the cafeteria and skidded as he toppled through the door.

Alex turned to Peregrine. "We really should clean these up. We can't let this factory burn like this. We can't let those innocent people burn like this."

Peregrine looked like the factory. Hm, well, I mean they were doing a pretty good job of burning though, why ruin a beautiful thing like that?

"We can't let ourselves burn like this either."

Good point.

Peregrine used his pixie-connection to summon the toys across the room. They sprung to life. Peregrine gave orders: the toy soldiers would carry the stuffed animals, dump them into the hot chocolate from the cafeteria, load them onto the catapults, then shoot them into the fire. It was a goofy idea, but somehow, it worked. And they didn't have time to question the logic of such a solution actually functioning... it was time to have a sit-down with Mr. Greenhollow.

In the cafeteria, as the army of toys worked their literal-magic putting out the fire, they worked out details with Mr. Greenhollow. It took a lot of persuading but Alex eventually persuaded Peregrine to not just feed Mr. Greenhollow to the reindeer. He'd have a more fitting end being disgraced instead. They agreed, to the best they could, that they would use this as an opportunity... Christmas would have to be missed this year, but next year would be better than ever. They would rebuild, and it would become a true elftopia; an operation run for the elves, by the elves. (The reality would turn out better than they imagined... and Peregrine, in his hero status, came to find that actually maybe he even could like people, if they gave him enough space, and didn't look down on him.)

Besides, Frederic Greenhollow had a worse fate for him... he didn't realize it at the time, but the future he had before him, returning with this failed venture, with his career literally having gone up in flames, in total disgrace... death would have been a easier option, really.

Peregrine Greyfeather and Alex Jellypin Pillowpuff lead Frederic Greenhollow out of the factory. They stripped off his fancy suit, down to the barest of clothes, and lead him over to the reindeer shed. Frederic stubled through the snow, shivering.

"Are you... are you going to give me a sleigh ride home?"

"Oh no," said Peregrine. "I'm afraid we can't afford that with all the losses we've been having... have to keep our remaining assets close... as a businessman, I'm sure you understand." Peregrine walked into the shed, and there was a click as one of the shackles unlocked.

Peregrine stepped out, and he and Alex began the walk back to the still

smoldering building. From the darkness of the shed, there was a step, and another step. . . a lone animal stepped out, cloaked in shadow, except for a pulsating red.

"No sleigh for you I'm afraid, but you won't be alone," Peregrine called over his shoulder. "Rudolf, with his nose so bright. . . he will guide you home tonight."

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