

## “A GOBLIN’S BEST FRIEND”

By Alexander G. Tozzi

Under shade of a birch tree a goblin played with fire. It held in one hand a wand with a cracked crystal at its end, and used this magic bauble to curl the flames, bending them as though they were rubber. It amazed the goblin at how much power this crystal yielded, and wondered if it could use that power to steal a pig.

Pigs were not a food this goblin enjoyed, but often he would hide in the muck of a pigsty and behold the gluttonous beast as it devoured heaps upon heap of garbage. Garbage, now that was a good food. The goblin’s belly was rumbling as it alighted the hill towards town. But this journey was not for food, which was plentiful at home. This was to steal a creature which would make a fine pet.

The goblin followed a scent of sludge and rotten vegetables to a farm where pigs could be heard snorting in the barn. Creeping close to the shadowy barn, the goblin brought forth the wand and flicked it at the doors. They burst into flames, and the wood disintegrated as though made of brittle paper. Now, the goblin held the wand as if it were a candle. Its crystal glowed as a candle would, and the goblin crept into the barn.

It smelled absolutely rancid-more so thanks to the flames. For person it would bring them to tears and nausea. Tears came to the goblin’s gimlet eyes, but they were tears of joy. Its belly rumbled almost as loud as the pigs’ snorting, and he felt the urge to feast on the slop.

Lazing in a pen the goblin found the pigs. They were covered in more filth than he was, and made no bones about stepping in their own waste. There was a long trough full of slop, with black onions and green peaches bobbing like shrunken heads. One especially fat pig was munching this slop as though it were a drunk who couldn’t get enough ale.

The goblin smiled with yellow dagger teeth.

This was what he loved about swine. As with goblins, pigs appreciated foods that people and pixies would vomit just knowing existed. Those rotten fruits were unmatched in flavor, the slop a gravy whose stock could not be found in a common icebox. The pig savored each bite, and the goblin whispered, “A goblin’s best friend.”

It would make a fine pet, this pig.

So, as the pig dined, the goblin worked the wand. Glowing a fierce red, the crystal started to hum, like a dragonfly. It was burning like a hot poker, and the goblin started to sweat. Beads of that sweat stung his eyes, but he held strong, conjuring the magic until the wand was white hot. The goblin thrust the wand like a sword.

Fwoosh!

The wooden door to the pen disintegrated, a vanishing plume of steam the only evidence that it had existed.

This frightened the pigs who began to oink and squeal. Some of them tried to run but either crashed into each other or slid in their waste. In either case the splashes of waste kicked up in the air, spattering on the walls and once in the goblin's face.

Greedy he licked it from his face, and with a snarl he entered the pig pen, wand held high.

Pigs came dangerously close to ramming him. With but a flick of his fingers the wand sent out strokes of flame which whipped the pigs, branding them and keeping them at bay. Some pigs were brave enough to rush the goblin, but these were incinerated by balls of fire.

It pained the goblin to see their charred skeletons, smoking on the hay. But that pig he desired, now still slopping away, was the one he wanted, and if others had to die so he could obtain it. . . well, that was just the way the cookie crumbled.

Now next to the trough, oinking pigs cowering in the corner, the goblin lowered the wand and aimed it at the feasting pig. It was oblivious to the goblin, leaning deeper and deeper into the trough, scrounging for those rotten fruits and vegetables.

Smiling ear to ear, the goblin relaxed the magic in the wand. It cooled from white, to red, to a pumpkin orange. Sweat still rolled down the goblin's face, but the crystal was hot enough to scald the desired pig into leaving the trough.

As the goblin went to corral the pig, shouts echoed into the barn. He turned with a growl to see the farmer and his hired hand running into the barn. "Goblin in the barn!" one of them bellowed. "Goblin in the barn!" And then their footsteps running away.

The goblin snarled. He should have known all those oinking pigs would wake the farmer! Soon they would be back with a band of

pitchfork wielding villagers to snuff him out.

There was still the crystal, though, but goblins are cowards at heart, and this one wanted to head for his home before anyone could follow.

“Time to go, pigmuck,” he said, bestowing a name to his pet. And he scalded the pig on the rump.

The pig snorted and went back to eating.

“I said. . .” the crystal glowed a bit hotter. “Time to go, pigmuck!” And he burned the pig on the rump.

The pig growled at him and went back to eating.

Now the goblin was furious. Breathing through his yellow dagger teeth, he conjured the crystal to send out lancets of flame. It was as if the goblin was holding a very potent sparkler, and he shook the flames at the pig, yelling for it to stop eating, to follow the goblin home where it could have all the garbage it wanted.

The pig shook with each stroke of flame, but the goblin’s promises of garbage fell on deaf, if not flappy, ears. It went right on eating.

Footsteps sounded, and there were shouts of “Use this charm from Doc Mayweather!” “No, no! Use this holy water from Reverend Little!”

Shrieking with fury, the goblin conjured the crystal to glow to its whitest, most hottest power. Sweat poured down in cascades, nearly blinding the goblin’s gimlet eyes. “Come with me now, pigmuck!” And he let loose a flash of fire right at the trough.

Fwoosh!

The trough was gone, and with it the rotten fruits that were unmatched in flavor, the gravy whose stock could not be found in a common ice box. Only a vanishing plume of steam, and a very angry pig were evidence that the trough and its luscious contents had existed.

“Come with me, pigmuck! Come with me now or I’ll do to you what-!”

But the the goblin didn’t have the chance to finish those words. Pigmuck may have been a big fat pig, but was anything but slow. With a roar the swine rammed into the goblin, sending the wand flying. Out of the creature’s grimy hands the crystal cooled, bumping into a support beam, falling into a pile of pokers. Pigmuck then beat the goblin to a pulpy mixture of goblin goo and pig waste.

A moment later the farmer, his hired hand and the villagers entered the barn, pitchforks and holy icons at ready. All had to pinch their noses against the awful smell. They searched for the goblin, but all they could

find, amongst a few charred pigs skeletons, was one especially fat pig, munching on a pile of a goo which made them vomit. . . but to a pig, it was delicious.

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