

*It Gets Better After the First Half, I Swear*

By Ian Morales

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there was this seaside village. Goblo village. A village filled to the brim with small, whimsical goblins. They joked with each other, relaxed with each other, felt at ease with each other. It was a very peaceful, close-knit village. They didn't work for much. All they needed to eat was grown by them, their "homes" were just hammocks with their belongings and their farms surrounding it, and, if they ever needed something, anything, they would just trade with the other. Life was idyllic, simple. But, one day, a particularly long-nosed goblin had an idea. "What if we used seashells as currency?" he thought. "What if everything had a set seashell value?" He did not mean any harm, but the poor guy had no idea of what it was he was bringing to the table. He proposed the system to the other goblins, and they agreed. Soon, they put their seashell-based system into motion. Goblins spent their time close to the sea, picking up any shells they might find. One goblin had found a lot of seashells and decided that he would give seashells to the goblins that worked for him. Soon enough, some unlucky Goblins started working for him. They planted and grew seeds, and they would be rewarded for their efforts. This seemed great for them, a sort of win-win situation. What they didn't know was that the goblin who had found a lot of seashells, who was now going by the name of Shell-Goblin, was selling the seeds they grew for double the amount they were getting paid. Not long after, Shell-Goblin started buying out other goblins' entire stocks. Making deals to get cuts of shells from what other goblins produced in exchange for laborers. Not much time passed before it had gotten to a point where every single business in the village had to pay some amount of money to Shell-Goblin. His greed didn't stop there, though. Gradually, incrementally, he increased the tax, until it got to the point where the business owners could not pay the living expenses, and ended up opting to work for him. Eventually, it became a cycle. All the money in the village ended up

coming back to Shell-Goblin. No matter what you did, who you paid, or what you bought, some amount, an increasing amount, would go to Shell-Goblin. Since the options for acquiring shells were lessening by the day, more goblins worked for him. He raised working hours and lowered salaries, because, well, the other goblins didn't have any other option. They either worked for him or starved to death. It ended up at a point where every goblin worked for Shells-Goblin. Every. Single. One. The money, it looped back around. Back to him. And he raised working hours, and lowered salaries. And there it goes. Back to him. And what's the point of decency if they can only work for him? More hours, less money. More hours, less money. It's only fair, right? They should be thankful he's offering them work, right? Because if not, they'd be rotting on the side of the street, without a shell to their name, knowing damn well they had the capabilities to work for Shell-Goblin. Knowing damn well, they could've provided for their families, for their poor, poor, starving children. The village grew into a town; the town grew into a city. All producing. All working for him. Shell-Goblin is aware of the suffering, of the back-breaking work those poor people have to do in order to get the bare minimum of shells required to eat, to be healthy... to live. He simply did not care; the shells were where the happiness was. What if he gave less than what he gave right now? He would make more, make quicker, right? The others, they'd figure it out, right? They had to figure out how to live, how to make their way in the world... for... him... right? And so, he did. Another chunk sliced off the shell salary. The goblins, they just couldn't do it anymore. One by one, they dropped. Like flies. They always had, to a certain extent. But never like this. They died. From hunger, from injuries, from sickness, from famine, from illness, broken bones, incompetence, from accidents, then, in desperate attempts at survival, there were murders, poisonings, theft, shootings... and Shell-Goblin was left with nothing. Nothing. And no one felt pity. For there was no one left.