**on the building and maintenance of bridge**

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# on the building and maintenance of bridge

by cloudycats

Summary

The Hellkite Wyvern goes to file a complaint. They end up making a friend and ruining every Chosen Undead's day.

Hellkite swept down onto the crumbling chapel. A smattering of bricks gave way beneath their claws as they landed, and they slid their foot to a stabler section with a hiss. These were perfectly good rocks that could have gone into building a perfectly good bridge, but instead they'd been allocated to *this* impermanent structure.

No taste, that was the problem with those scaleless pygmies. No taste in any sense. You cooked them and they *crisped*, without any in-between state of rare or well-done, and then you had to abandon them in disgust and of course they stayed there forever, mucking up the view, because no one else cared for their charbroiled hides either.

Or, worse, they popped back up to have another go at it, as if they hadn't already made enough of a mess of things, and you couldn't just watch them *succeed*, obviously. Letting them get uppity about their place in the world didn't sit right.

Which resulted in more fire, more screaming, more coal that no one would sweep up smearing your lovely bridge. A vicious, vicious cycle.

Hellkite would tolerate no more of it.

“You!” they snapped at the source of the infestation.

“Hello!” said the crow on her nest, head tipped up and to the side to look at them through one dark eye.

She seemed terribly unconcerned for a creature so flammable. Hellkite hissed again, wings hunching. “I've seen you flying across the sea, carrying pygmies back and forth. Explain yourself.”

“Well, there's this prophecy,” said the crow.

She settled back onto her nest, fluffing her feathers smugly at a job well done. Hellkite did not set her on fire only out of a vague sense of kinship for another giant winged creature with a fondness for high perches, but their fuse was short and it had been lit since the first armored fool that had chanced their flames. “*Yes*? What about it? Does it tell you to keep bringing new pygmies?”

“Yes,” said the crow.

Hellkite blinked.

The crow continued, “That is literally what it's about.”

“...I can set you on fire.”

“I would rather you didn't,” she said, “even if it seems I've been an ungracious neighbor. Did they bother you?”

“They are irritating me right now.” They swung their head towards the grey pygmy glaring at them from around the cliffside stairway. “Look at that! How do you stand it?”

“That one's not bad. He just sits there, usually.”

“They're an eyesore,” they said. “They keep running over my bridge and it needs to *stop*.”

“Why?”

They swiveled their attention back to the crow. The question left them speechless for several seconds. She might as well have asked *why do you not eat rocks?* or *what is the meaning of life?* – questions with answers so obvious that hearing them asked at all felt unreal. “Because they're *awful*?”

The crow said, not unkindly, “Are you scared of them?

Hellkite gasped, but only from outrage. “What? No! No, of course I'm not, how could anyone – only, you've seen how they move? I don't want anything that scuttles like that walking on the same spot I do. Horrible creatures. You look at them and you can imagine them crawling all over you with their prickly little feet and their fuzzy little bodies. How do you stand to touch them?”

“They're really not as bad as all that,” said the crow. Hellkite would have begged to differ if they weren't too overcome with disgust to articulate. “Is your bridge one of the ones up in the Undead Burg?”

“The biggest!”

The crow cocked her head. “Has a portcullis on the end, and that statue of the firstborn – ?”

“That's right.”

Slowly she said, “Isn't that the only way to reach the Parish from the Undead Burg?”

Hellkite replied, baffled, “Can you not fly?”

“For the humans, I mean.”

“Who cares about them?”

“No, I'm just saying, maybe the reason they keep using your bridge is because they don't have a choice.”

“They can go under it just as well. Or around. They don't have to keep going *over* it.” The crow looked at them, and after a moment they sniffed and said, “Well. Well! If it was so important to them, they ought to have built a second bridge. They could do it right now. I wouldn't stop them." That was a lie, though in the moment they did not mean it as one. "Anyway, if you wouldn't *bring* them here....”

“Prophecy,” the crow responded, in a *what can you do* sort of tone.

Hellkite squinted at her. “Where are you collecting them from anyway?”

The crow hummed. “Well, there's a cliff out that way.” She fluttered a wing towards the sea and the fog.

“They're all from this cliff?” Hellkite asked. Some cliffs were rather flammable. The crow nodded, and Hellkite said, “Is it far?”

It couldn't be. She made the journey frequently – too frequently – and she had eggs to sit. But instead what she said was, “Far enough.”

“How long does it to take to fly?”

The crow said, “What is time, really?”

Hellkite hissed at her.

“It could be a few days, could be a few years,” she said. “It's always the same here when I come back, so I don't expect it matters much.”

“A few *years*? What?”

“Could be,” said the crow again.

Hellkite demanded. “Are there more than one of you?”

“I don't think so.”

“How long have you had the eggs for?”

“Oh....” The crow shuffled a bit and peered down at the nest. “Some time now. They'll hatch when they're ready, I expect.”

Hellkite stared at her. They opened their mouth to say something, then slowly, slowly closed it.

Maybe they shouldn't touch that.

The crow waited politely for them to gather themselves enough to scramble for a different topic. “A – anyway, about that prophecy of yours! If it's a real prophecy it'll come true no matter who does what. You don't have to act on it.”

The crow gave that its due consideration. “...Maybe?”

“No, not *maybe*. If people have to make it happen, it's only a to-do list.” They reared up so they could look properly down their nose at her. “What do you get out of being a pygmy ferry?”

“What do I *get* out of it?” she echoed, parceling out the syllables as if testing a phrase from a foreign language.

“Are there other things on this cliff you visit? Nice things?”

“No. Not really.”

“Sounds like you can stop whenever.”

“It's something to do. It gets boring around here.”

“I hate it,” Hellkite declared.

“If you feel that strongly,” the crow said, “I suppose I can stop. No one's asked me to before.”

Hellkite preened. That hadn't been so difficult. They hadn't even needed to commit any grand arson. They might still set the shrine on fire later, of course, on principle, but they could do it for themselves rather than for business.

Although with the source of new pygmies cut off, that still left all the pygmies already in Lordran. And there were a lot of those. Maybe because they'd built the Burg in the first place and were its original residents, but that sure sounded like their problem, not Hellkite's.

“That doesn't stop the undead already here from needing to use your bridge, though,” the crow said.

It turned out she was remarkably sensible when she wasn't spouting stupidity about the pygmies being tolerable. “True.”

The crow tipped her head. “There are plenty of bridges in Lordran. Surely there's another one you could like.”

“*What*?” Hellkite bristled. “I won't be *chased off – ”*

“No, no, this could work!” the crow said, and Hellkite recoiled, snout scrunching. They'd never been interrupted. “We can look for a new bridge for you together! I have nothing else to do. What do you like about your bridge right now?”

“I – a new – together? What? What are you saying?”

“We can find you a perfect bridge,” the crow announced, eyes bright, “better than that one.”

Hellkite paused. “You think there are better bridges out there?”

“Lordran's a big place.”

Slowly Hellkite said, “If you're wrong, my bridge will still be here.”

“There's nothing to lose.”

“And it could be fun,” Hellkite mused. There were many parts of Lordran they'd yet to try setting on fire.

“And it could be fun!” the crow chirped. “I haven't gone anywhere new in, oh, *ages* now....” She trailed off, and some of the enthusiasm dimmed. “I can't leave the eggs for long.”

Hellkite spluttered. “You abandon them for years at a time!”

“I don't stay in Lordran for that.”

Somewhat suspiciously Hellkite said, “You only need to keep them warm, isn't that right?” The crow bobbed her head, and Hellkite lifted a foot. “I'll carry them. Body temperature for me is warm for you.”

After a long moment the crow made a thoughtful noise and gave Hellkite a once-over. “You don't mind watching out for eggs?”

“What's to watch out for? They don't get into trouble on their own.”

With an odd intensity: “And if they hatch?”

Hellkite frowned. “I wouldn't drop them.”

The crow chuffed, sounding rather more satisfied than the answer warranted. “That's a start.” She spread her wings. “We'll find you your bridge!”

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