Somewhere Between The Knife And The Arrow

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay’s first paragraph.

"... He peered down into the cavern. He could see only the faint orange glow of the torches that lined the walls of the main cavern which gave rise to several secondary passage ways, and so on, forming a vast network of multi-level tunnels that weaved and intertwined endlessly underground. The echoing snap of water drops, losing their last, futile grip at the sharp tip of stalactites and splattering onto the cold hard floor of the cave, played at his mind. Soon he would enter into a new world; one that offered both life and death equally and without discrimination. If the Dungeon Master were right, 'The Gold Of The Gods' would be found at the end of three possible tunnels. Jarren checked his supplies and weapons, and then waited for his ally Koff."

Cover Page Footnote
Appeared in the issue: 1986.
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After a short while Jarren saw the silhouetted form of Quavra, with Koff on her back, beating her wings in the distance. Koff pulled the reins gently to the right, and Quavra banked and descended, flapping her leathery wings horizontally and extending her talons forward. A few moments later she landed and Koff hopped off of her back, giving her a friendly pat on her shoulder. He pulled from his sack a freshly killed tagga rabbit and settled down with Jarren to a quick meal.

Afterwards, Jarren and Koff unscrolled the map, provided for them by the Dungeon Master, and studied it; Jarren did so obsessively. He spoke, over and over in his mind, the grave words of the Dungeon Master: "The Gods ask much of the creature who does not find The Gold Of The Gods. After only one moon, they will take your magical powers from you; after three moons you will be exiled into hell, forever. It is their place, not yours Jarren. You will encounter many creatures in your quest, some posses the power, others do not. There is no way to tell. Let me, before you go Jarren, give you the knowledge of salvation: If, after three moons have passed, you do not hold the power of the treasure, self-sacrifice will admit you to the Divine Kingdom. It is seen as a gesture of submission..."

Jarren played the scenario out in his mind. He was consumed with the passion of the game; it became a perverse hunt.

Koff released Quavra from her harness and gave her the leftover meat, a "thank you" for her mild burden. A beautiful creature, thought Koff, deserving of more than these few morsels. She walked in a circle, twisting her head right and left, and bobbing her neck up and down, wiggling away the last feeling of the restrictive harness. With a gust of wind she was up and off, leaving a small cloud of dust and leaves behind.

After some last minute preparations they were now ready.

Koff fastened a three-pronged, steel anchor to the lip of the cave opening. Jarren gave it a few strong tugs and then descended into the cavern. Koff followed close behind. They dropped their supply sacks to reduce the weight load, facilitating their climb down. The clank of their weaponry striking the hard rock floor echoed throughout the tunnels into the distant caves. The two muffled thuds that followed were that of Jarren and Koff and their subsequent contact with the same floor.
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DeRitis: Somewhere Between The Knife And The Arrow

Soon, two newly lit torches brightened the glow in the main cavern and the sound of the water droplets was joined by the deep chink of cold, black iron reverberating into the abyss, as the sacks were lifted from the ground. Unintelligible murmurs traveled down a few passages before their weak soundwaves were killed by the infiniteness of the complex. The two torches rose and their flames flickered and began to recede into the far side of the cave, burrowing through the still, damp air, sounding like a flag on a windy day. The flames grew smaller. Then they disappeared.

Some time later Jarren and Koff came to the end of the long and winding tunnel. A new light now illuminated the dark walls, drowning out the torchlight. Through a hole in the wall directly in front of them shone a bright yellow light, its rays beaming majestically through, reflecting off the fine dust particles suspended in the air. The hole, just wider than a human head, was but one of many landmarks they were looking for. Koff dropped his sack to the ground, again echoing throughout the chambers, and poked his head excitedly through the hole. He stared in awe at the beauty he was beholding. He motioned to Jarren with his hand to look. As Jarren began to walk forward he noticed a small jerk in Koff's body. Then it began to twitch and jerk wildly. Jarren ran to help and pulled Koff back out of the hole. He screamed in terror as he realized what had happened, and dropped Koff. His fists, clenched in pure fright, were held stiffly out to his sides by hyper-tensed muscles as he watched the body slam painlessly onto the ground. It surged violently with muscle spasms that deformed it to a grotesque bundle of jolting flesh; all nerve endings were short circuited having no place to send or receive impulses to or from; the brain was gone. His head had been ripped, not so cleanly, off; no doubt a small snack of some sort of creature, winged or otherwise.

Jarren peered through the hole, at a distance, out of reflex and fear. At that moment he heard a savage roar behind him. Quickly he whipped around to be confronted by a huge beast, green scales, pale yellow belly and wings; a dragon. The beast sat on its haunches, spread its wings, lifted its head high, pointed its snout upward and then inhaled deeply; its chest enlarged. The sound of the air rushing down the monster's throat was almost as deadly as what was to come. The fishy, sulfuric stink of the dragon had no bearing on Jarren; instantly he reached above his head, extending his muscular arms their full length, and locked his hands together by his fingers. Just as the dragon pulled his neck back and lowered his head, mouth open and fangs dripping saliva, spewing forth flames, the heat of which could turn rock into molten lava, Jarren engulfed himself in a luminescent, pearly-green force shield. The white-hot-orange flames swallowed the spherical shield but did not penetrate it. Jarren at once grabbed his crossbow, drew an arrow from the pouch on his back, and fired into the belly of the monster, reloading and fired into the neck of the beast. The flames stopped, the dragon fell, gasping for life giving breath that his mangled esophagus would not let him have. Blood pumped out of his throat and Jarren finished him off with a shot to the heart. Then he looked around. Nothing was spared vaporization. Even Koff's body was now just a smoldering stain on the scorched rock of the tunnel floor.

The maps! Jarren panicked. He prayed, by some miracle, that they would be saved. That was too much. Their remains, along with Koff's, floated gently in the air, lost forever. There was no place to go without those precious maps; The Gold Of The Gods was gone now too; searching the many tunnels and passages would take a lifetime, something that Jarren seemed to be at the end of. He could not turn back, the Gods would not allow him to leave without paying a substantial penalty; he was the one who invaded their territory.

He sank in desperation to his knees, remembering the words of the Dungeon Master once again: "...self-sacrifice will admit you to the Divine Kingdom..." Dirty sweat dripped off of his chin as he drew another arrow from his pouch and slowly held it up to his belly. He looked up, poised and ready, and then saw what he recognized to be Koff.

"Jarren! No! What are you doing!"

No, thought Jarren, it couldn't be. It must be some sort of apparition, a ghost. But it seemed so real.

He hesitated.

"C'mon Jarren! Stop it! Put that down!

No, it's just a spell, he thought. He held still again for one small moment. With a scream he plunged the arrow deep into his gut.

"No! Wait! It's just a game! It's just a game! Oh God no! It's just a game!"

"Jerry, it's just a game...!"

POLICE REPORT OF DEATH

Case No.: 50174
No. of victim(s): 1
Sex of victim(s): Male
Age of victim(s): 18
Name(s): Jerry A. Spencer
Type of death(s): Homicide/suicide
Weapon(s): Kitchen knife (no specs.)
Witnesses: 1
Name of witnesses: Paul R. Kinnington
Psychological profile of suspect (If suicide then victim):
- Loner (very few friends)
- Introverted personality, non-participatory
- Semi to extreme antisocial behavior*
Record of mental illness:
- Insufficient data
Circumstances surrounding death:
- victim at home with friend after school
- Friend describes behavior of victim as erratic (i.e. obsessive)
- Apparently, suicide touched off by failure at a game*
- Dungeons & Dragons (Role playing game)*
*See witness testimony (F 316a-i, pg. 2)

NOTE: This paper was originally written for Eng. 251 and is not based on a real incident, but rather, was inspired by the controversy surrounding the game "Dungeons & Dragons." All characters in this story are purely fictional, as are the circumstances and situations presented in it. Any relationship to real persons is coincidence and not intentional.

Eric DeRitis
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Jarren finished him off with a shot.

The Angle, Vol. 1986, Iss. 1 [1986], Art. 11

https://fiusenetics.sdsu.edu/angle/vol1986/iss1/11