

The Phargol-Horn

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The Underworld (To go or not to go)

As they peered into the cavern their first impression was how beautiful it was inside. No one would usually place the words beauty and Krak N'Borg in the same thought. This place known for its darkness and evil deeds was not a topic that many wanted to even discuss. But with all that was before them there was no way to get around it. It was truly breathtaking.

At this point a major decision had to be made. Do they explore the cavern or return to the Obelisk and report their latest findings. Curiosity was fast outweighing fear.

After much discussion it was decided that they would split up. Groosh and Graffyn would stay behind. The others would return to the Obelisk and report what they had discovered. This was a logical choice especially with Sal being by far the most capable at handling the flying duties. With this settled Sal, Pree and Poffles headed back to the carpet. As they moved onto the carpet Poffles said this trip had made him very tired and he was going to crawl into the middle of the carpet to take a long nap. As was often the case he made himself invisible. Sal was surprised that Poffles seemed so calm since he had voiced so much displeasure with being told that he had to return with them to the Obelisk.

Sal removed two crystals from his pouch and placed them at the carpets end. He then leaned over and whispered a few charm words. He appreciated how hard they would have to work. It was obvious that they were straining as a loud pop was heard followed by a plume of blue smoke.

The carpet began to rise upward. After reaching the proper height to clear any obstacles it slowly moved forward. Sal realized that the trip back to the Obelisk would take much longer as his crystals had exhausted much of their power. This he estimated would reduce their speed by at least fifty percent. Sal too was tired and noticed Pree was already fast asleep. The three were on there way back. At least that was what he presumed.

Having the ability to become invisible can be a wonderful power. No one is ever sure where you are or what you are doing. Poffles had mounted the carpet quickly. He had laid down in full view of Sal and Pree. There was nothing suspicious about this. Then he made himself invisible.

This is an interesting process to watch. It starts at the top and works its way to where the last thing you see is the feet of the individual. When he reappears it works in the opposite direction with the feet becoming visible first and the head last.

What happened next was for Poffles only to know. He slowly rolled off the carpets left side and onto the ground. In their fatigued state Sal and Pree were not likely to notice the wrin-

kles made on the carpet.

Poffles waited until the carpet started to rise and was moving out of his sight. He then ran as fast as his little feet would carry him towards the cavern entrance. He wasn't about to miss out on what Graffyn and Groosh were going to discover.

Meanwhile back at the entrance of the cavern the reality of what they had chosen to do was sinking in. Groosh and Graffyn were now all by themselves, in Krak N'Borg, and no real plan of what to do next. It seemed like hours that they stood motionless when in reality it was only a few minutes. Around them it was now becoming dark and cold. This was not making their situation any better. They dare not build a fire. It could be spotted and could put them in great danger.

Dragons must have their internal burners flaming all the time for they handle cold temperature quite well. Where as Groosh had no difficulty dealing with the chill in the air Graffyn was another story all together. His old wizard bones were no match for the bitter cold. He needed some warmth and he needed it now. To the side of the cavern he spotted a small thatched hut. He decided to look inside to see if some form of covering could be found. If it only had a roof it would have provided some good shelter.

The hut had many wooden shelves with items stacked on them. Baskets scattered about the floor overflowed with assorted other objects. The hut smelled quite bad. The front sections consisted mostly of weapons. Among these were swords, hatchets, pikes and shields. Next to the weapons were stacks of pointed helmets. Other shelves were filled with leggings and armor plated attire. Graffyn spotted something that might solve his problem. A small pile of fur covered cloaks. He picked one up, shook it off and put it on. It was definitely not to his taste but it was very warm. Graffyn hesitated. He thought this item was something that someone of a lesser intelligence would wear, not a distinguished wizard. He removed the garment and placed it back on the pile and headed towards the door. As he opened the door he was met by the chill of the air. He hesitated. The garment wasn't that ugly he thought. He hustled back to where he had placed the garment and put it on. For good measure he even grabbed one of the helmets and placed it on his head. Old wizard's heads get cold too. No one would ever see him in this outfit except Groosh. He would swear him to secrecy. The other wizards must never know.

Groosh could hardly hold back his laughter but he knew he must, if not out of respect but to not add to the already tense atmosphere. Wizards tend to hold a very high opinion of themselves. After all it is quite an accomplishment to be able to become a full fledged wizard. Just ask any apprentice. For some their vanity is incredible. If you ever attended one of their functions it was like going to a grand ball. They even give awards for things like best outfit or finest trimmed beard.

With Graffyn now out of danger of freezing to death they laid down to catch some much needed rest. Graffyn fell fast asleep in a matter of moments. It didn't take Groosh much longer. He wasn't sure why but Groosh could not reach that deep level of slumber that most need to feel well rested. He constantly thought that he was hearing something. On several occasions he thought he heard loud chanting. Once he even awoke to the sound of what was loud snoring but when he turned towards Graffyn he was peacefully quiet.

The bright light brought an end to Groosh and Graffyn's rest. Even this was a small discovery as when someone spoke of Krak N'Borg the word dark was almost always used as the adjective. The light shone on beautiful buildings as well as run down shacks. In their haste to

check out their surroundings the previous day they had not noticed many things. Now they could take a moment to look about, but only a moment.

The two were now faced with a question. What next? There wasn't all that much to discuss. Their options were basically two. They either stayed where they were at and waited for a reply from the Obelisk or investigated inside of the cavern.

Doing nothing seemed an inappropriate course and not very exciting especially for a master wizard and fire breathing dragon. They would explore the cavern.

Sal was making slightly better timing than he expected on their journey back to the Obelisk. It still was quite slow and at times it seemed like they could fall to the ground. Crystals can only be recharged so many times and no charm words were going to power the carpets crystals to a level that would increase their speed significantly. He calculated his speed by using all his usual variables. His calculations just did not quite match up. No matter how he calculated he was making a better time then he should have been. He rechecked his calculations, they were never wrong.

Pree was awake and resting at the far end of the carpet. Poffles had not risen yet and was still in his invisible state. At least that's what the two thought. Sal decided it was time for Poffles to rise and shine. He walked to the center of the carpet and leaned over carefully as not to startle his companion. His hand reached down towards where he anticipated Poffles would be resting. He leaned over farther and farther. Sal lost his balance and fell to his knees. He crawled about the center of the blanket swinging his arms wildly but met no resistance. No one was there. Sal stood up and shook his head. He now realized where Poffles was and why his calculations had been off.

When they were deciding who would stay behind at the Obelisk Poffles was very unhappy that he was chosen to be in the group to return along with Sal and Pree. As the carpet had started its rise and left the ground at the Krak it had dipped oddly to the left for no apparent reason. At the time it meant little but now Sal knew the reason why. Poffles had used his invisibility to sneak off. This would also explain why Sal's travel figures were thrown off.

There was no need for a lantern inside the cavern. It was as bright inside as it was out. This was partly because of the placement of crystals that rested inside circular holes that had been cut into the walls. Their bright glow reflected off the walls. The walls themselves consisted of a material that was different then Groosh or Graffyn had ever encountered. With several colors running through them the crystal made them glisten and shine. This rainbow of lighter shades provided much of the brightness. They decided to call this krystaleen. Graffyn had removed a tablet from his pouch and was recording all they found on the trip. This would be invaluable if something was to happen to them. Anyway wizards love to record things. Just go ask Reammon the court librarian. He has more scrolls in his extra storage than Wodema has herbs. Many are invaluable whereas others do nothing more than take up space. The worst to deliver useless scrolls is Hotpot. He feels every recipe he ever created must be saved for prosperity.

Each step in the cavern was perfectly formed in the shape of a wing, wide in the middle and tapered at the sides. Rounded edges removed any chips and a large letter N was etched into the middle of each one. A huge amount of time had gone into crafting each and every one.

Sculpted on the wall, above every third step, into the wall was the head of a creature unknown to either Groosh or Graffyn. It was covered lightly in fur. The fur grew heavier above the eyes and around the chin area. Oversized ears with severe points and long lobes hung on each side. The eye sockets were quite large with rather small openings in the middle. Inside these openings crystals had been placed. No real nose was present just three holes. Even though the mouth was closed three long pointed teeth were clearly visible. It appeared they hung from the outside of the upper lip. All in all it was a bit discomfoting to have so many of these heads along the walls.

Graffyn removed a new Rueggan invention from his pack. Rueggan had found it among the ruins that the ancients had left behind. By placing a crystal on its top it was suppose to transpose whatever you were looking at onto a piece of black material that was inside. It was like drawing a picture without having to draw. The item had been badly mangled when Rueggan found it and all you could read on it was letters Kod. So Rueggan dropped the letter d and renamed it a Koggan.

Graffyn remembered Rueggans instruction for its use. He placed it to his eye and looked into a small clear area on its back. Then he looked at the head on the wall. Next he removed a small crystal from his pouch and placed it on top of the Koggan. The small Koggan began to hiss and vibrate. Moments later a large flash occurred. The term blinding light would be an understatement. The inside of the cavern lit up as if a bonfire was going on. Whatever the walls were made of, they reflected light like nothing he had ever encountered. The Koggan fell from Graffyn's hands and onto the ground.

Graffyn and Groosh stood motionless, which was a good idea since the bright flash left them unable see anything. After a brief time their vision slowly started to be restored. The Koggan was lying at Graffyn's feet or at least what was left of it. Rueggan's find would no longer be called the Koggan. It was now called junk.

Graffyn pulled a blank scroll from his pocket and started to sketch a picture of the head. Groosh thought he heard him say something to the effect that who needs these new contrac-tions when nothing works like the old ways.

Groosh bent down to pick up the pieces of the broken Koggan. He didn't want to leave any evidence behind that they had been there. But this was not his major concern. The nois-es he thought he had heard during the night were back and this time he was wide awake. And they were coming from somewhere inside the cavern.

To be continued.....