

The Eye of Argon

Argon the Archer was not the strongest of warriors, nor the most skilled.

But he had a preternatural eye for weakness. When hunting aurochs, he put his shaft into the sweet spot between the bull's neck and shoulder. When fishing for trout, he shot them cleanly through the gills. If you put an uncut diamond before him, he would study it, eyes narrowed, for an hour or three, and then, with a single sure and decisive movement, stretch out a hand to tap it with one nail and ? bingo. Facets.

But his was a minor skill, little valued in the Stilted City, where one citizen might have the power to turn silver into gold, and another the ability to call deer from the forest and birds out of the sky. He was respected as a man, but never highly valued.

Until, that is, the day that the dragon Smaraugh attacked.

At the darkest moment of the battle, when the wooden battlements were ablaze, and the bucket brigades beginning to falter, Argon stood high on a rooftop, arrow notched, and squinted through the smoke. Smaraugh came soaring toward the city, low over the lake, reeking of wrath and supernatural vengeance. His true target was Gloradrial the elf-queen, whom the Lake-Men in their pride had granted asylum from the fiendish Lords of Darkness. But the destruction of the fabled Stilted City was a gladness in his evil heart.

Onward came the dragon, a flying mountain of destruction. Golden dragon-fire dripped from his jaws.

Argon lifted his bow, pulled the string back to his ear.

He loosed his shaft.

Straight and true that arrow flew! Its fletches burst into flame as they passed through the dragon's fire. Its shaft was crisped and blackened when it hit the dragon in a narrow gap between its mighty scales. It sank deep within the great worm's flesh.

And as the dragon's dying body fell, twisting and spasming, into the center of the lake, a hand clapped Argon on the shoulder.

"Well shot, bold archer!" cried a gladsome lady's voice. It was the elf-queen Gloradrial herself.

Argon, who had been staring, stunned, at the mighty dying creature, spun around. In his hand was his next arrow. Reflexively, he saw where she was weakest. Reflexively, he jabbed upward, toward the holy lady's heart. All in a wonderment, he saw how her eyes widened. Her life's blood splattered him as she fell.

"Oops," he said.

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