

“The Doings of Narconius”

by Brandon M. Dennis

Prologue

The floor of the tunnel was cool and dusty, unused as it had been for many years. Roth had no torch to light his way, only his keen senses that seemed somehow amplified in the night. He felt his way along the tunnel floor, and it rose and fell before him as he walked on. Strangely it was smooth, as if it had been worn over the course of many years.

Suddenly the tunnel dropped before him. Roth tried to maintain his footing but it was too late. He stumbled and began to slide down the tunnel, tumbling head over heel until he smashed his head against a hard, sharp rock wall. His eyes saw stars and his mind went black.

When he awoke he could see little around him, but he was aware of firelight nearby. He was warm, wherever he was, almost too warm but not quite, and he was resting upon a not-so-comfortable pile of lumpiness. His vision cleared and he rolled over onto his side. The mound, which he had been resting upon, slid a bit, and he heard a jingling sound. As he gazed at what was underneath him his eyes went suddenly alight with wonder when he realized what he was seeing. Gold coins, as deep as he could thrust his arms, were stacked in mounds all around him. He thrust one of his arms deep into the mound and pulled out a large green jewel, uncut and untamed, glistening in the firelight as if it had just awakened. As he gazed through the jewel he thought he discerned something moving within it. But no, it was not within the jewel it was... it was behind it. Roth moved the jewel out of his vision and gasped.

There before him stood the very thing he had been hunting, the thing that had driven him mad with anxiety for countless months before. A smiling dragon with teeth like ice grinned an amused grin, and suddenly laughed. The fire within the room rose and the laugh echoed all around him. A breeze wafted by but it was not a cool breeze. It was a hot, searing breeze, a breeze that made the hair on his arms shrivel into ash.

Roth sat there in wonder for a moment and with his mouth agape.

“No need to be freighted, good lad,” said a booming voice, a voice that echoed throughout the room and sounded at once like thunder and then again like a blazing flame. “I have had many a chance to snack on you since you entered my home, to crunch down on your tasty bones, and let your juices slide down my throat, ah! to mash your organs between my teeth, and then pick them clean with my forked tongue, mmm,” said the dragon, and he laughed an evil laugh. “But no, not today, I have decided not to satisfy my hunger tonight. Do you know why?”

Roth felt relieved and confused. He realized that he would not be killed and thus had nothing to fear, but he also realized that the dragon before him was not about to let him go. All fear left him, well most of it anyways, and curiosity filled his mind.

“I haven’t the foggiest,” said Roth standing up, looking eye to eye with the massive serpent before him. “I mean, if I were a dragon and a tasty treat entered my lair I would certainly eat him, so why have you spared me?” The dragon chuckled.

“Our minds are akin! Yes this is perfect. You will do nicely.” The dragon stretched his whole body and the mound underneath him trembled, and then he shuddered a weary shudder. “I am very tired of being a dragon you see. I have been a dragon for tens of thousands of years. I have seen the births and deaths of all the great nations and kings. I have fondled every piece of gold. I have every goblet and cup, and every jewel that has been cut from the earth. And now I am largely forgotten, just a fairy tale in the minds of men, and hunted by those that know better for my scales. Which...” said the dragon, peering keenly at the now nervous Roth, “I guess was your purpose for coming here.”

“Yes well, as a Rouge you see, I get so few consignments and, well, this one would have given me so much money...” he started but the dragon snuffed and smoke came out his nostrils and into the gaping mouth of Roth, forcing him to hack and cough.

“Your petty concerns mean nothing to me. I have heard them all! It doesn't matter. Like I was saying (indulge an old dragon, let me finish my tale) I am tired of being a dragon. I have eaten all types of people, from the young to the old, from men to women, from children to adolescents, and frankly, nothing interests me. But what does interest me is the life of the human. Ah yes! The very life that I rob from my victims. I would like to experience the human life one of these days, oh yes, very much so, for it is

so full of interesting things and dozens of stories, enough to keep my old, old mind amused for many a day. Yours is the life I would like to live, my good Roth, and I am ready to offer you a proposition.”

“Oh I don’t know... I really must be getting home... got the wife and my bazillion of kiddies waiting for me and all...” said Roth but the dragon roared and Roth covered his ears.

“Never interrupt a dragon when he is speaking!” he growled, but the fumes from his mouth lessened and the scales on his face relaxed and he became calm. “I am willing to offer you all the treasures in this room,” the dragon outstretched his wings from one entrance of the cave to the other, “if you will bind yourself to me.” Roth’s eyes went wide with wonder. He looked about the room lustily and his eyes glinted with the thought of diamonds, jewels and crowns of gold. But then he grew suspicious.

“What do you mean bind?” he asked, and the dragon smiled, a large toothy smile.

“Oh nothing really, its just that I want you to be my servant. Come here every week or so and tell me the story of your day, and the people that you meet, and when you take a wife (I know your not married you fool, I know all things) and so on and so forth. And in exchange, you have access to my horde. Is it a deal?” Roth thought his luck was too good to be true. That’s all he had to do? Just tell the dragon a few measly stories and this whole horde would be his? He could do that! He could buy his own kingdom, and build a harem, and he could be the king! He could make a bath out of gold, and a bed out of jewels, and he could buy a white horse and make the bridle out of silver!

“You have a deal dragon!” said Roth but the dragon eyes him closely.

“Do I? Say it. Say, ‘I bind myself to thee, Narconius The Devourer’ (for that is my true name, not merely ‘dragon’, fool) and the deal will be sealed.”

“Very well!” replied Roth, and he stood up atop the largest diamond and brought himself up into his most commanding pose.

“I, Roth of Farnagton, bind myself to thee, Narconius the Devourer, in exchange for your dragon’s horde!” Suddenly a mighty wind filled the cave and the torches flickered out. A flurry of whispers filled the cave and dark laughs filled Roth’s mind. The loudest and darkest was that of Narconious.

“Fool!” cried the dragon in an evil cackle. He stood himself up on his legs and roared in delight. Fire singed the roof of the cave and formed ash. The spaces between his scales began to glow a green, eerie glow and soon Roth was blinded by the light. The cave began to tremble and smoke billowed out of the dragon’s nostrils.

“Never, ever, trust the words of a dragon!” His forked tongue flicked out and grasped Roth by the midsection and lifted him on high. In a growl of laughter so fierce that it made Roth deaf, green flame issued out of his mouth and engulfed Roth. Roth screamed in agony and gripped his face. Only he did not burn up. His arms grew larger, and soon his whole body did. His calluses became scales, and his bones realigned. Soon the distinction between the two beings, dragon and human, faded and they were one mass of green light and smoke, twisting and revolving in a wheel of fire and fury. The gold below them melted and the roof above them burnt away. One terrible scream filled the place and a ghostly shade of a man drifted from the whirling chaos and wafted towards the dungeons below the earth. Soon the green light went out and the trembling stopped. The cave had collapsed and the moonlit night sky shone above. The gold was gone, melted and fused to the living rock below and all was suddenly quiet. The wind stirred slightly and the clouds all disappeared. The moon and her stars shone upon the earth and the pale light soothed the steaming skin of Roth. The dragon was nowhere to be seen.

“Well that went better than I thought it would,” said Roth to himself. He breathed in deeply and exhaled and coughed. “Whew, all that smoke must have finally gotten to me. But it will be good to breathe fresh air again.” He adjusted his hair and clothing, wiped the ash off of his leather boots and walked towards the nearest town. As he walked in the moonlight he laughed, and his forked tongue whipped in the night sky.