

Wish Man

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In the basement of a giant's castle, in a large stone-crafted chamber, underneath a spell of dim light, knelt an old wizard. Not a nasty, cranky old wizard that would turn a person into a bug or a worm and step on him, but a good wizard of the White Order. His name was Seril, Seril Bagmond from the Sorcerers Guild of Castle Bruin far to the West.

The guild of white wizards, of which he was a member, had sent him to this castle on a quest to steal a recorded scroll-chart that held the keys to a successful entry and exit to a labyrinth. Within this labyrinth, lay a network of mazes, rooms, caverns and corridors supposedly holding items of great power. So the legend was . . . yet this was only myth.

The council deemed this quest important enough to send Seril here to retrieve it. How they knew this particular map was here, in this fortress, made him curious. Seril had learned to never question The Council. As a collective, they were seldom wrong. For years Seril, himself, had the suspicion that the scroll was in this general region of country. The council was correct, he had found what he had come for.

As it lay unrolled before him, he looked over it, taking in its every detail. This place, according to this map, was south near the borders of a land in which the legendary 'Ishrake Lord', a being of great black-magical powers, the enemy of Seril's order, supposedly dwelt. It was a land of desolation and evil - a black and deadly region, full of the prospects of constant death and carnage. Even if there were no Ishrake Lord, other things that crept, that hunted, killed, and fed could easily claim the unlucky.

Seril thought to himself, **“No one knows if this black sorcerer really exists. But I am one who will never know the riddle to that mystery, the council be willing.”**

Smiling, with a shimmer flashing across his eyes, he rolled the thick, leathery,

paper into a tube and glided it carefully into the metallic cylinder that was its resting place.

"Well, that's that", he whispered through a cheery, yet sober, smile. He arose and put the scroll case into a long pocket within his robes. At the moment Seril raised his aged hands, and opened his mouth to utter the spell that would send him home, the foot-thick, iron and wood door at the far end of the chamber burst open. The door smashed heavily against the stone wall, causing a tremble throughout the room. Seril feared the chamber itself might collapse.

Within the doorway loomed the largest man he'd ever encountered. The Giant bellowed as he lunged toward Seril, amazingly swift for one which appeared so uncoordinated and bulky. He found his life threatened as the giant loomed over Seril, unsheathing and waving a massive sword above him, bellowing, **"What you do little man!"** The old wizard noticed immediately that this creature's breath was enough to turn a medusa to stone.

Seril was never one to freeze up in any situation. Without hesitation he said, raising his arms majestically, **"Why, my fine friend, I have been sent here to grant you one wish, whatever it may be!"**

Now, Giants aren't renowned for their intelligence, but are famous, and dreaded, for their witless stupidity and overwhelming brawn. Spell-casters are especially wary of them because these hulking creatures have the ability to withstand even the most powerful forms of magic without realizing a spell has been cast upon them. This unconscious ability terrifies those who study the mystic arts. Especially if they encounter a Giant. Studies had proved the skulls of these great brutes to be so thick, only cold hard steel could penetrate them. Seril's magic would have no effect, unless the wizard casting could trick the giant into letting the sorcery manipulate him. This type of business was never easy.

Seril was now being forced to take a deadly chance. He needed time to cast the spell which would ensure his deliverance from the castle. He had come too far to yield to failure now.

The giant growled and swung his blade, which Seril ducked, holding his hat

down on his head with one hand as the giant, now somewhat curious, asked,
"What is wish?"

Sparks flashed as the sword chopped an impressive piece of stone from the wall next to where Seril had been standing. Quickly, Seril pulled a beautiful, silken scarf from his sleeve with a flourish and waved it up at the giant.

"This is one I can grant you -- I have two more", he hastily he added as the Giant jerked his massive blade free of the wall, sending bits and pieces of stone falling all about Seril. The giant aimed the large tip of his sword at Seril and thrust. The old magician side-stepped the blade as he waved the colorful scarf out at his assailant. The giant snatched the extravagant scarf out of Seril's hand.

"Me like. But you in me home." With a curious pause, the Giant looked at the capturing colors of the scarf, which seemed to move as if they had a life of their own. The Giant peered at the mage and sniffed.

"What scarf do?" The giant raised the great blade over Seril's head once more, half-interested in the scarf, half bent on splitting him in two. Glancing up at the raised weapon, Seril nervously declared, **"My friend that is a scarf which can only be wished upon once, only once!"**

Seril jumped upon the giant's chair and then leapt to the top of his great desk. Less than half as tall as the Giant's boot, Seril felt like a baby snake cornered by a mongoose. The giant looked at the scarf, suddenly thoughtful . . .

"What once?" The sword fell to the desk, missing Seril completely. A large mug, half filled with a dark liquid, exploded behind Seril as he ducked, grimacing. Large splinters of wood tore away from the desk as the giant yanked his sword back and up again.

The Giant dropped the blade to the desk-top, ever increasingly easier to evade the blade, all the while forcing a smile across his face. Seril knew that if he made the giant mad he might not return from the quest. He noticed the Giant wasn't concentrating on him as an adversary any longer. His aim was distracted.

"You may ask only one wish from this scarf, friend! That is all".

"All what?", the giant said, knitting his great thick brows together, as he idly

struck out again at Seril, missing. Obviously, the impression had finally entered the thick head of this leviathan; Seril wasn't there to fight. He seemed friendly. The giant liked that.

Seril pointed to the scarf and replied, **"One wish. What will it be? You only have a few moments until I disappear!"**

The giant raised its huge blade, hesitated, then looked at it.

"Uh . . . oh . . . sorry." The massive sword lowered as the giant smiled sheepishly at the old man.

"Quite alright my good friend!" The wizards' hat slipped off his head and fell to the desk behind him as he looked up at the leviathan looking down on him. Looking directly into the giant's eyes he smiled broadly. The giant suddenly broke out into a hideous grin that would have cause children to scream. Seril turned and picked up his hat, secretly wiping sweat from his face with his sleeve as he breathed a sigh of relief.

The old sorcerer slapped his hat back onto his aged head and turned around to see the giant fumbling with his weapon, trying to put it away with one hand, at the same time holding up the 'wish scarf' in open curiosity. Staring at it in wonder, the Giant bit its fat lower lip.

"Uhhh . . . uhhh . . . uh I got my wish ready, little perdy' scarf!" Seril concealed a deceptive grin behind his snow-white beard as the giant nervously, hopefully, looked at the silken material and then down at the old man.

"Well, wish away!" Seril said with a flourish of his arms.

"Me not want go way!", abruptly bellowed the Giant. His free hand moving up to grip the hilt of his great sword. **"This me home!"** Seeing his bad choice of words, Seril hastily interpreted the meaning of his words.

"My fault powerful one! I meant that you should make your wish quickly. I feel I am being drawn back to my home far away, where it is too dangerous for any other to find in safety." He waited, hoping that this Giant was as dense as legend and tales had spoken of.

With a cock of its head, the Giant wondered openly at what it had just heard.

Pondering and reflecting, it suddenly understood. Panicking, it sputtered, "**I . . . um . . ., oh, what was I think bout'? Wish!**", the giant said, a victorious grin splitting his face.

"I wish . . . I wish . . . I . . . I was . . . bigger!" The giant raised his arms towards the log rafters above, victory set in his countenance.

The old wizard's face broke into a feverish smile, mischief gleaming in his eyes, just as the face of a child who opens a gift at his "day of birth".

The giant had consented.

Seril's hands moved quickly, as he spoke in time with the accompanied bending of hands and twisting of fingers. He cast the spell upon the giant, relieved that luck was now with him.

With a bellow of surprise, the giant grew, ascending upward toward the roof, the thick leather straps of its armor snapping and splitting. As the giant's head viciously struck the main beam that spanned the inside of the great chamber, its armor fell, plummeting to the floor all around his feet, some pieces striking off the desk where Seril stood. Seril staggered back, intent on not failing this quest by a plummeting piece of armor after overcoming a Giant.

The giant fell to the floor with a terrified yelp, placing a hand to the top of his head. As everything settled, Seril took the initiative and leapt off the desk next to the Giant, snatching up his scarf from the floor where the giant had let it fall. The leap to the stone floor made his bones ache up to his teeth, yet he was not about to lose his favorite scarf. He'd had it for so long.

Before the Giant could recover from the blow, the wizard waved his hands in complicated configurations. Casting a powerful spell he began to vanish from before the Giants' eyes. He smiled and bowed.

"Farewell, my mighty friend. Farewell."

Seril was gone.

Seril Bagmond materialized within his private, cozy, stone chamber where he had lived for the last four score and six years. With a grimace, he staggered to his

bed and collapsed into its comfort. As he lay there he reflected silently.

“It is getting more and more difficult to cast the Transport Spell. I shall have to travel by donkey all too soon, if I am to travel at all. I am getting too old for this.” He was old and gray. He knew it, felt it in every joint and muscle in his body. But being a student in the arts of magic helped him to retain more of his body and mind better than anyone outside “the arts”.

Remembering the Giant, Seril wiped a lock of sweat-moistened hair out of his face and leaned to his right, picking up a crystal-ball set within the sharp talons of a baby dragon's foot near his bed. He had made the dragon's foot into a holding stand for the powerful crystal-sphere not quite ten years ago, and was quite proud of it. Seril had seized the crystal-ball in the lair of a Mountain Troll, a beast which he had single-handedly slain twelve years earlier. A "nasty job", he called it.

With a sigh, he gazed into the ball, softly uttering the word to activate its power to envision things the naked eye could not see. As the power within the crystal came to life, he looked for the Giant he had just departed from.

Quickly spying the Giant, who was just sitting up and rubbing his thick head and grimacing in pain, Seril wondered if this Giant actually felt pain. Apparently so; a good study. He couldn't remember any documentation on giants that informed him of this. This was an important finding, though he didn't know how this information could prove useful.

The Giant rubbed his head and looked around dismayed at the now too-small, worthless armor pieces scattered about him; now too small to fit him. A distressed look washed across its face, causing it to roar in dismay, **"Me not want big! Me want small . . . wish man! Bring perdy scarf back!"** Seril sighed, his heart softening, and had pity for his new found acquaintance. With a single gesture, the spell was removed. The Giant slipped back, once again to his natural size, and was obviously pleased to see the armor it had once worn could now be donned again.

"Thank wish man!", it bellowed as it reached for his armor pieces. **“Me need**

fix!"

Seril's voice softly echoed through the room around the Giant, making the hulking brute smile from ear to ear. **"You are certainly welcome, my fine friend"**.

On the following day, Seril gave the parchment to the council. His eyes twinkled as the council members intently studied the secrets of the mysterious labyrinth, half of them trying to conceal the obvious satisfaction which etched their faces. This labyrinth was a place which no one, until now, knew how to penetrate without this very document. He, Seril Bagmond, had wrested it from the "dreaded" domicile of the beast!

Seril glowed inwardly, satisfied at passing the latest test of the council, a feat that would bring him to the next order of higher power in the mystic arts. He hid his pleasure carefully, never showing his true delight, for he never wished another to see his pride. The council did not approve of self-rewarding attitudes. Seril did. Seven more advancements would finish the life-long training of magic for him. These seven promotions were many years away, and he had, tops, a dozen remaining in him. The thought made him chuckle within. He unemotionally knew he might not make it that far in life - not likely anyhow. A faint smile, concealed by his snowy beard, slowly appeared across his lips.

What was important was that he had made a new friend who might at some future time help him on a personal quest. He could use the Giant's brawn to do the heavy work, as he wielded his magic in unity with that mammoth blade. His brothers and sisters here in the castle were powerful, true, but only some of them more so than he. He felt he could accomplish anything. Seril Bagmond could lay to rest the childhood curiosities which had possessed him throughout his youth and man-hood years. The unexplained legends, like the Underworld, what lay past the far and distant mountain ranges, of curious things only spoken of in fire-side tales, could now be sought after. In his many years, these curiosities had never failed to poke and prod at the inquisitive parts of his mind; they only grew. Seril's

hidden smile of satisfaction grew more broad than ever.

The honorable guild-master nodded at the five other council members and looked at Seril, smiling warmly.

"Seril, this indeed is a great find. But studying this treasure brings us to the conclusion that only half of this puzzle lies before our eyes. Three days hence and you will take your journey south to the Land of Desolation and enter the Labyrinth -- this web of mystery -- and find the other half". The council leader pointed at the aged document before him.

"One of your friends here may attend you on this most dangerous task. Or you may go unaccompanied, it is your decision".

The pride and the smile abruptly vanished from Seril Bagmond's face as thoughts of the Ishrake Lord flashed a nightmarish scene in his head. How could they do this? He had always been taught by the council not to enter the Forbidden Lands where this Lord of Darkness supposedly dwelt. His mind raced at who he could choose to go with him. Most would just get in the way. Suddenly a broad smile replaced his expression of shock.

"I accept this mission", he declared with growing conviction, the wheels of thought spinning a great plot within his mind. The council all nodded in unity. It was done. There was no turning back now. But he did not care.

A cheery spirit accompanied Seril as he rested up for the next three days, preparing himself for the journey that lay ahead.

Part Two: Endings

Out on a scarred and decrepit terrain Seril rode on the back of a beautiful, golden-maned, War-Horse; one of the finest breeds in the land. Nervously, his mount rolled its eyes in mild defiance, complaining about the company it had to travel with. Patting his mount on the neck, Seril smiled at the thought of this fresh adventure.

The transport spell which had brought them into this forsaken land had been a gift of the council. A gift not often given. In fact, Seril had to debate harshly with the council to receive such a favor. He was not about to tax his strength at the beginning of such an undertaking . . . such an adventure! It was too delicate a mission, and might prove his undoing. Then again, he knew he was gaining the upper hand against the council by getting them to do some of his dirty work for him. He smiled, satisfied, and stroked the coarse mane of his mount.

Looking up to his left he smiled at his new-found friend and asked, "**Tommax, have you ever ventured far and wide?**" Seril pointed at the horizon. "**Have you been to those mountains far in the distance -- close enough to touch them?**" Tommax, the Giant, shook his head.

"**Me no go. Me get lost. Afraid get lost. No more find home. Sad.**" The giant looked down at the beautiful golden mane of the horse and nervously grinned. The Giant's great hands twitched as it looked at the horse. Tommax had a fascination for lovely things, and the golden hew of the mane entertained that fascination.

They traveled in silence for a time. After a league, Seril persisted. "**I would never let you get lost, Tommax. I always know the way. We will find hidden secrets and treasures of knowledge and gold wherever we go. And I would always divide what we find in half. Half for you, half for me. Would you like to go to those mountains, and beyond. Then, after a long while grand adventure, return to your home, and I to my home? It will be dangerous. I might be killed.**" Tommax frowned and shook his massive head, walking on in

its own deep, dark thoughts. Seril persisted lightly.

"And you, Tommax, might be killed as well as me." Breaking the silence, Tommax roared aloud, not unlike the roar of a great waterfall.

"Me never killed! You never killed! We no die, we alive!" The leviathan held a tree-thick fist up in front of its face. **"Me strong!"** His booming voice lowered, almost reverently as the Giant looked down at Seril. **"You no die"**. Glancing once again at the golden mane of the horse the giant asserted, **"I protect pretty horse too."** The sorcerer smiled in delight at Tommax's next words that boomed forth, causing the War Horse to stop and rear high.

"We go Wish Man!" Seril dug his heels into the flanks of his steed. The horse bolted into the blackening mists ahead with a snort. With ease the giant ran up beside the speeding horse, feet thundering and shaking the ground. Seril turned and smiled at the Giant, causing it to bellow out laughing. Seril's hope was kindled. He was glad to have such a friend and shield.

The powerful wizard heeled his mount and sped on toward the distant range of mountains, Tommax running after . . .