

Greed Before The Fall

“Five gold pieces. That’s the highest I’ll go.” The glimmering gold coin clinked as it was pressed onto the wooden desk. It joined its four siblings, in front of the guild building’s clerk. “It isn’t a highly ranked mission – you won’t get better elsewhere!”

The bartering bee-protogen grinned, swooping each piece of gold up and into his small satchel. He’d managed to convince the worker to raise the reward all from just two gold! Azzy walked out of the guild hall three coins richer than he expected, so his mood was as light as his wallet was heavy! He cracked his knuckles on his way out, stretching his arms to warm his muscles up for the journey ahead. There wasn’t great difficulty in the quest he’d haggled with – Azzy just had to travel to and survey an otherwise un-explored dungeon, and come back to the guild with all the gathered information.

It took a while for Azzy to wander over to the mission’s target. The sun bathed him in its warm light, high up in the sky – he’d left his hometown just after breakfast. The protogen stood in front of a relatively narrow cave entrance, its insides completely shrouded in darkness. Not even the light from the sun could pierce through. Clear evidence that this *is* a dungeon, after all! Azzy remained confident, though, and so stepped through this barrier of shadow without even a second thought. The inside of the dungeon was illuminated with countless candles, standing proud along the dungeon’s firm stone walls as their faint orange light radiated onto all that was around. The protogen’s eyes needed just a few seconds to adjust to the lighting, and so he was off exploring almost immediately.

An *experienced, top* adventurer such as Azzy noticed something strange, as he listened to his footsteps echo. There was no noise at *all*. One would expect at least foreign footsteps, or the click-clacking of insectoid beasts. In fact, there wasn’t even any sign of life within! No cobwebs, no nests or eggs. The protogen paused when he saw a split in the otherwise rather plain dungeon – he was left with choosing between travelling down the left or the right. With nothing to fight, and nothing to see but candles and stone, there didn’t seem to be much for him to gain – so far, at least. Azzy strolled down the corridor on his right, for right is *always* right.

The walk seemed to stretch on, the hallways that the protogen sauntered down rarely giving way to something new. It wasn’t difficult to avoid the trapped pits, though Azzy *did* notice the occasional pile of what looked to be fabric that was scattered upon

the floor of each pit. It was an odd place to have scraps of fabric, not to mention the colour and pattern of each - some were blue and white, others seemed to be brown or purple or red! Each piece had tattered edges, as if someone had torn it apart by their own hand rather than bothering with tools.

Pits weren't the only thing that Azzy easily avoided: the occasional swinging blade, pressure plates that caused the wall to attempt to crush him, just to name two. The protogen's mouth had stretched overly confidently, from ear to ear. The creator of this dungeon must have been an amateur – not an ounce of challenge was being extracted from this place. Despite all these traps and extended corridors, though, there hadn't even been sight of some fortune for him to nab. Azzy was under the impression there'd at least be *something* for him to take under the guild hall's nose, but the only golden shine that he'd seen all day had been from the five coins he'd taken early.

The bee-protogen occasionally found his eyes fluttering as he wandered along, bored out of his very mind. There hadn't been a trap for quite some time, not even an already-triggered pit that he had to leap over! Five gold coins was a steal for exploring this, on one paw, but on the other...*surely* there was some treasure to be ha—

“I knew it!” Azzy exclaimed upon seeing that familiar golden glimmer at the end of the corridor! The adventurer couldn't exactly see what it originated from, but he was merely pleased that there was at least something to chase after! The protogen's steady pace didn't prove to be enough for Azzy, as he instead evolved to a more hasty gait! His brown cape flapped behind him, revealing a lighter tunic beneath! Of course, being distracted by treasure was the *very* first thing adventurers were taught not to do. The protogen only remembered that lesson when he heard a loud click during his mini-sprint towards the golden light! “Oh, crud!—”

And, just like that, he triggered the first trap of the night! The protogen yelped as a sharp piercing sensation stung him right between his shoulder-blades! Azzy began to hurry away from the plate he pressed, trying his best to ignore the grumbling sensation that was beginning to build within his gut. The protogen's tunic had begun to feel a little tighter around the middle, but that didn't stop him from continuing on his journey – after all, he had a dungeon to chart out! Azzy's speeding through the corridor triggered two more enchanted darts, each piercing him in different places. The pin-cushion protogen found that the golden glimmer at the end of the hall grew in size as he moved, empowering him to keep speeding through! The tightness of his garments was far more noticeable than before, his once flat stomach bloating into something resembling a ball. Its growth continued even as the protogen made it out of

the booby-trapped room, a sliver of his black-furred gut peeking shyly out from beneath his tunic.

At the very least, he'd reached that glimmer he'd seen – and it was a most beautiful bounty. A golden chalice, bejeweled with various coloured gems. Emeralds and rubies, sapphire and amethyst. Azzy wouldn't have thought it out of place within a monarch's grasp! The still-bloating protogen took steady steps further into the room, eventually moving his attention away from his prize. The chalice stood upon an ornate stone pedestal, in the centre of a moat. There was no bridge, no platform, to walk across to reach the treasure – if Azzy wanted it, he'd have to jump over the water! The protogen walked along until he reached the edge, before crouching as best as he could with his growing tum. It wasn't too difficult to leap over the water, and the reward was most delightful – the chalice!

In his paw, the chalice remained perfect and luxurious. Azzy admired it closely, holding the artefact up. There wasn't a single imperfection on this bounty, not a scratch nor a speck of dust. It looked as if it had just been forged and polished, prepared to be handed off to the most opulent of rulers. The bee-protogen was so absorbed in inspecting this new item that he completely missed the *click* that sounded when he lifted the chalice. He had already jumped back to the other side of the moat by the time he noticed any sort of change. Azzy took a few moments to look at himself, gazing into the chalice's reflection of him. He seemed fine, if a little tired from the unstoppable movement, though the protogen couldn't help but to notice his gut! It had been just about peeking from beneath his shirt just a minute before, but it was causing his shirt to ride up – to about halfway up Azzy's furry tum. It wasn't just his stomach that had been inflating though: his entire body felt lighter! Each movement was a little more difficult, a little slower, due to his increasingly large chest and limbs. Thankfully his paws retained all their dexterity, at the very least.

In the corner of his vision, Azzy was able to see the hallway he came through be sealed off from him! He was locked inside, not a single crack nor way out! A bead of sweat formed upon the black-furred protogen's forehead, his grip on the chalice tightening. The moat drained quickly, every millimetre of water removed. He watched a section of the ceiling split apart, a series of stone arms emerging from the hole. They matched the walls and floor, making it difficult for Azzy to keep track of them – camouflage was difficult to see through, after all. Two of the rocky arms carried an ink-black tube, the occasional drop of some clear liquid dripping from its opening.

The unoccupied arms opened their hands, facing their palms towards the protogen! They began to race towards him, and the still-growing Azzy barely had the energy to

dodge the first pair – let alone the second, third and fourth! The darts that had stuck themselves in him had come loose, clattering to the ground as the various hands grabbed onto him. If the adventurer hadn't triggered all those dart traps, he might've been able to avoid these hands for longer! It was almost embarrassing, being caught so quickly. Azzy's arms were forced behind him, locked in place by a pair of the stone hands, while his maw was held – gently, yet firmly – open. The tube descended from the ceiling proper, the two rock hands that held it quickly pushing it into the protogen's mouth. The end of the tube was almost like a ball of sorts, too big for the protogen to spit back out easily! One hand kept a grasp on his visor, the pair holding onto his arms remained too, as most of the group retracted back into the ceiling. The very last of the group plucked the chalice from Azzy's paws, taking the item with it into the ceiling. The dripping, as the protogen found out, was water! Another click sounded, and the tube immediately began its work.

Water began to pump into the explorer, swiftly joining the enchantments within him. Azzy's mind connected the dots as his body continuously grew, thoughts racing! The moat! He was drinking the water from the moat, he realised as his tunic fully rode up to become but a bra to his inflated chest. The adventurer didn't have many options for escape, and so he tried to spit the tube back out. It was a difficult task – focusing on swallowing every pump of water whilst fighting against the grip of the hand on his visor – that the bulb-like mouthpiece of the tube worsened. Despite his swift thinking, he still couldn't get himself free! Azzy continued to fill with the dungeon's water, not given a single break or reprieve as his size increased beyond anything he'd seen before! The tunic that was but a bra just moments ago had already been shredded by his burgeoning body. His stomach sloshed and wobbled with every gulp, resting at *easily* the size of his body pre-dungeon! The rest of his form wasn't far behind, each limb bloated into resembling tires more than sections of somebody's body. His head itself had begun to sink into his mighty chest and his visor's cheeks! Azzy's neck had vanished within minutes, leaving behind no traces.

When the hands that pressed his arms together removed themselves from his body, the protogen saw a potential way out! He just had to grab onto the hose himself, to tug it out! The adventurer strained, as he tried to move his arms...to no avail! He was too late! He'd chugged so much water that his jiggling body never had a chance to break free – his arms were barely mobile, too large and unwieldy to do much. Azzy could only curl his fingers and toes, almost all other movement limited and purged. Yet, there was still more water to drink! It was beginning to strain his stomach, more full than he could have ever thought possible! The protogen's once-fit body had bloated into something like a sphere and the only indication of which part held his head was the tube! Despite the utter fullness that Azzy was feeling, he couldn't stop himself

from swallowing and drinking yet more. His belly grew red as yet more water flowed into him, not giving him even a moment of reprieve! The only reprieve he received was at the end, the water's pressure decreasing down to a trickle.

Even that proved to be too much for the protogen, though, as he burst apart at the very seams! His eyes opened wide as he exploded in a beautiful array of crystal-clear water! The room was flooded with the liquid, washing away what remained of Azzy – scraps of clothing, black fur, and his visor – into the moat! The remaining stone hand dragged the tube back into the ceiling, before descending once more. The chalice was placed upon the pedestal again and the arm ascended back into the hole before it closed up. Another adventurer prevented from stealing the dungeon's treasure!