



PRAVDA?

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Jokeserver Pravda?!

Woooooo. 'Nuff said. (Whoever counts all puns herein officially has too much spare time and should be working on BOOOOOTH.) Also, next week is elections! Get your nominations in today, and candidates, **SUBMIT YOUR PLATFORMS TO PRAVDA?!**

Jack Graham Takes Up the Gauntlet

by jokeserver

Legend speaks of a magical gauntlet that grants to the user the ability to move objects without touching them. It was crafted by a magically gifted artisan hundreds of years ago. Before he died he hid the powerful item somewhere in the castle Lumgraft. Long thought a myth, Lumgraft actually existed, once the home of an ancient Count who named the castle after himself.

The castle itself has long since decayed into ruin, and not much more exists than metal caves. The hills of green nearby turned gray with death. The once-lavish moat bled into the ground and now Lumgraft is surrounded by swamp. The swamp is filled with horrible creatures, and the castle filled with traps, many still operational, though the castle is pretty much toast.

But every legend of treasure will bring adventurers, no matter the peril involved in retrieving it. Many such adventurers perished, killed by creatures, drowned in the deep dark waters of the swamp, or felled by the traps in the ruins of Lumgraft.

But we will not focus on the dead. Instead we shall recount the adventure of the treasure hunter Jack Graham.

Jack Graham was a strange sort of fellow. He had a great attention to the small things, but he lacked an understanding of how the world worked. Heck, he had trouble comprehending the economics of his smallish fantasy city Darton. But he understood the concept of money, and more importantly, treasure. (He also understood power, but never really thought about what he'd do with it.)

As with many other adventurers, Jack had heard the legend and was compelled to retrieve the gauntlet and with it gain fame, power, riches, everything he's ever wanted. So he packed his stuff together, a sword, some armor, food, some potions and scrolls, a guide to nethack, his money, everything he thought he'd need. And he set on his way.

Lumgraft was nearly three months away if Jack were to walk the whole time. So with his meager funds he bought a donkey named Max, and rode his way across the land toward the ruins of Lumgraft.

Jack and Max came to a forest, The Forest of Lost Souls. Those who entered the Forest of Lost Souls unprepared or unguided were sure to be lost forever, doomed to die in the Forest and haunt its confines for eternity. Jack knew he would be traveling through the Forest on his way to Lumgraft, and he had attempted to prepare for it. But it is not well known how to safely navigate the Forest. Jack had a compass.

Max did not seem too happy about entering the Forest, but he did not make a fuss for fear that any noise he made would attract evil spirits.

Night had fallen and the forest was dark. Even with the compass, Jack could not say he was going in the correct direction. The trees all looked the same, and Jack was not sure he wasn't going in circles. It was highly difficult to see his compass clearly, and trees further in the distance were not visible at all in the darkness.

A light appeared in the distance, and they approached. A man was sitting beside a small fire, apparently trying to keep warm in the cold of the night.

"My God," he said as they approached. "Someone else is traveling through the forest tonight!" He stood to greet Jack. "It's dangerous to go wandering through the forest by yourself! But I have been back and forth through these woods many a time, and I can

lead you back out in the morning." He indicates the way Jack has come (or rather, believes he has come). "My name is Alarin, and I am on my way to Darton."

"I am Jack," said Jack, "but I have come from Darton, and I seek to exit the forest on the other side. Perhaps you could guide me back the way you came, and I shall safely exit the forest without having to stay the night."

Alarin shook his head. "I cannot accompany you back the way I came, for I have pressing business in Darton, and I do not wish to be any later than I already am. But I can give you directions."

He pointed down a row of trees. "Stay between the trees, walk in a straight line. You will reach the edge of the forest if you keep between the trees. But beware, for on your left you will be able to see less and less, until the darkness obscures the trees. Don't step into the darkness."

Alarin looked back at Jack. "Are you sure you wish to travel alone?" He shook his head before Jack could reply. "Well, I suppose I cannot change your mind. But I shall be here tonight if you wish to return to Darton with me."

Jack and Max walked down the path Alarin indicated. Ahead they could see a clearing, and to their left, as the man had said, the darkness drew closer. Soon they reached the point just before the clearing, where the darkness was just about to engulf the trees on the left.

Here Jack stopped and looked. The clearing appeared to be the end of the forest: beyond these trees there was only grass and fields for a good distance. And on his left the forbidding darkness. Beyond those trees there was nothing.

Jack pulled on the reins and dragged Max into the darkness. Instantly the illusion vanished and they appeared on the other side of the forest. To their right, where the "clearing" had been, the forest extended for a great distance. Max saw he was safe and calmed down. They began walking forward when they heard a wail from behind them.

Turning, they saw the specter who had given them directions. "No!" Alarin shouted. "Don't leave! I just want some company..."

"I am sorry," Jack replied, "but I have pressing business and I cannot afford to spend eternity here."

"Why?" Alarin whispered, his chilling voice still carrying to them on the wind. "Why did you not listen to me?"

"Because," Jack said, "I could see right through you."

The ghost of a man once called Alarin faded back into the forest.

Jack and Max continued on their journey to Lumgraft.

They traveled across flat, treeless land, across grasses and fields. The forest retreated behind them, and Lumgraft, still far in the distance, grew closer ever so slowly. Of course, they couldn't actually see it, because of the mountains obscuring the view, but Jack knew they were getting closer.

Nothing very interesting occurred to them during this leg of the trip.

Jack and Max finally reached the town of Esra. Jack went to the store to buy more supplies for the rest of the journey. The store owner, immediately knew he was an adventurer because he was not from Esra. She asked Jack what he was doing there, and Jack told her his story up to leaving the forest, perhaps more in detail than I can, perhaps a little exaggerated to impress her (she was kinda cute, Jack thought).

"Wow!" she said, impressed, perhaps a little exaggerated so Jack would pay her more. "So what happened after you left the forest? Anything exciting between there and here?"

"No," Jack mused, "not really any exciting. In fact, it was rather plain."

Having purchased what he needed, Jack rested at the inn before continuing onward to Lumgraft.

The final obstacle before the swamp of Lumgraft was the mountain range known as the Mountains of Ardor. There was a rather convenient tunnel through the mountains that Jack and Max would be able to take so they could avoid battling the elements above the mountains.

The dark tunnel of the cave extended beyond the range of Jack's vision. The light from outside lit only a portion of the way in. Jack lit a torch and continued through.

The tunnel emerged after a bit into a great antechamber, filled with dozens of pedestals, upon which once sat great treasures. There were statues all around, of warriors and wizards and adventurers. The ceiling was high, but not visible past a layer of smoke that hung above the room in a great haze.

A stone golem sat upon one of the pedestals, smoking a great golden bong. The golem spotted Jack.

"Hey man," the golem said, extending the bong to Jack. "Wanna hit? This stuff's great for relaxin'."

Jack took the bong and examined it. Jack was suddenly filled with the temptation to relax and take a hit off the bong. He looked around at the statues of the adventurers. There were a handful right next to him. They looked quite relaxed, as if the artist had captured them as they expelled a breath of a relaxing drug.

"Naw," he said, giving the bong back to the golem, "I wouldn't want to get stoned."

"Rock on," said the golem, taking the bong back.

Jack and Max exited the antechamber and continued through the tunnel, finally emerging on the other side of the mountains.

Soon they reached the swamp. The castle of Lumgraft was there, on the other side, but with the remains of the moat there, it was not possible to cross.

Jack tenderly stepped into the water. The waters began to move as his foot sank below the surface very slightly, and he quickly withdrew it. A creature suddenly snapped at the location where his foot had just been. The croc glared sullenly at Jack and vanished again under the water.

"I guess we'll have to find another way across," Jack said to Max. They began to circle the swamp.

They had gone nearly a third of the way around the swamp when they came across a small wooden house sitting on the edge of the swamp. A sign above the door read "Lumgraft Shoes" and had a simple depiction of a booted foot stepping on a crocodile's head. Jack knocked and an old man appeared and opened the door.

"An adventurer!" he exclaimed. "Come in, good sir, come in! You must be here to buy some shoes, hm?"

Jack entered the store. "So why is it that of all places, you choose to sell on the edge of a swamp?" he asked the proprietor.

"Ahahaha!" laughed the man. "Almost all of my customers invariably ask that. Well, my boy, I'm afraid I only sell one kind of shoe, though I have stock in several sizes so that any customer can walk away satisfied."

He asked for Jack's shoe size and quickly scanned the shelves, pulling a box down and setting it on the counter in front of Jack. He opened it to reveal a pair of brown leathery boots, each with some strange black substance lining the bottom of the shoe.

"I'm sure you've already discovered the swamp is difficult to cross," the store owner explained. "I sell this shoe to those who wish to cross it and gain entrance into the castle Lumgraft. All I ask for the shoes is 50 zorkmids, but I do have to keep a living here, and all my customers so far do not return from the castle, so if you have any extra for me, I'd be quite grateful."

"I don't understand," Jack said. "Why do I want these shoes?"

"It's quite simple," the man said. "You can't cross the swamp without them. Use the boots to get through."

Jack gave him 60 zm, 50 for the boots and a tip of 10 (Jack certainly wouldn't need it inside the castle), and promptly switched his footwear for his new gear.

The boots didn't seem like anything special at first, but outside, Jack stepped tenderly into the water again. This time, his foot met a firm resistance on the surface of the murky water. He was walking on the surface of the water!

Leaving Max behind untethered (so that the animal could run away if he didn't return), Jack crossed the moat and entered the dark, gloomy castle Lumgraft.

In the main corridor lay two skeletons, one with an arrow hanging between a pair of ribs, the other with an arrow in the chest, straight through the plate mail it was wearing. Carefully, Jack examined the floor and found a stone that, when depressed, would cause an arrow to fire at great speed across it. It was so powerful, Jack could tell, the impact sent those two adventurers all the way across the corridor to lie against the other wall. The arrow Jack caused to fire shattered against the stone wall.

Having escaped the arrow trap, Jack arrived in the great hall, where Count Lumgraft's great portrait still hung high on the north wall facing the entrance. The visage of the ruler that once lived in the castle stared angrily at Jack, as if he were guilty of defacing his tomb.

"Nice place you got here, sir," Jack said to the painting. "I hope you don't mind if I take a look around. Of course, if you could direct me to the room containing the gauntlet, I'd be much obliged."

The painting said nothing. Jack shrugged and said, "Conversation's a lost art."

He opened the west door and discovered it led into another hall, this one lined with a red carpet. He made his way down the hall slowly, still wary and watching for traps.

A skeleton lay to the side, partially flattened by a passing boulder. Jack looked ahead to see a door smashed open by the boulder, which had embedded itself in the far wall. Jack looked back at the skeleton and shook his head sadly. "To come this far only to have your hopes crushed..." he said.

Jack searched the room but found only more traps and no treasure or hints at the treasure.

He returned to the main chamber again. The painting of the Count stared at him. Jack opened the east door and stepped into the hall. It was just like the west hall, but without the skeleton and the broken door. Oh, and there were stairs at the other end that led upstairs.

Jack checked out the room but found nothing of interest. So he went up the stairs, carefully, trying to avoid any traps.

He reached the top without incident.

If I described in detail how he searched the castle you'll be bored out of your mind, so I'll spare you the drill.

Jack eventually discovered the room that held the gauntlet (though, of course he didn't know it at the time). He entered the room, and great iron bars suddenly appeared on the door, preventing him from exiting. He was locked in, unless he could find a way out.

After his initial shock at that, Jack turned and examined the room. A right glove lined with some sort of metal along the underside of the fingers lay on a table. He picked it up and put it on.

Nothing happened.

Jack flexed the hand. The metal on the outside made it difficult to close his hand properly, and he had a distinct itching feeling on the inside...

He tried to remove it. "Shit, it won't come off," Jack cursed.

He reached for his sack, to grab something that would enable him to remove the curse on the glove and allow him to remove it. By habit, he used his right hand, though his right hand could not grab. He managed to pull a scroll out of the sack anyway, before noticing that he wasn't actually holding it.

"Aha!" he said once he understood. "It *is* the gauntlet!" He read the scroll anyway to remove the curse so that he could choose whether or not he wore it.

There were two switches on opposite walls. Jack pulled one with his left hand. Nothing happened. Jack walked across the room and pulled the other one. Nothing happened.

Then Jack had an idea. He pulled one with his hand, and reached out to the other one, imagining his right hand activating it.

The bars on the door withdrew.

"Heh," Jack said, "That was quite a hands-on experience."

Jack returned downstairs to the main chamber. The painting of the Count stared at him. Jack pointed at the painting and removed it telekinetically from the wall.

Jack returned home with Max, having successfully plundered Castle Lumgraft of its two greatest treasures. And in doing so he gained a great understanding of how the world worked, how all the pieces fit together.

He had finally gotten the big picture.