



# Shaman's Fable

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By Bill Ricardi

An official tale of the world of Panos.

Shaman's Fable is a short prequel to 'Another Stupid Trilogy', set in the world of Panos. It is the tale about the end of Shaman's adventuring life. In it we learn about unholy pacts for immortality, the fate of the last chief of the legendary Jeywafa tribe, and the heroism of Sorch's father, Scire.

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Me wise orc.

Dat's what they all says to me. Dey go, "Shaman, you wise orc, tell story about gods." Or they says, "Shaman, only you help, teach little orc about swamp."

So I talks about Kenvunk. And I talks about no step in lizard pit. I show smart orc how to make magic and feed Voodoo Engine. But when little orc become big orc, dey almost never see me. Think they hear all of Shaman's fables already. Gots to do stuff and things, no time for crazy orc with flying lizard and magic weeds.

Well, I gots story dat I never tell noone.

Dunno why I write dis down now. Don't wants boy to read, it break heart. Don't want bashers to read, they just make fun of boy more. But maybe, many seasons away, boy's kids read. Or dere kids. They should know where Sorch come from. I means, where he really come from.

So if you read dis, you no tell Sorch. You promise dat now, or you gotta stop reading.

OK. Good promise.

Dis is time before me settle down. Before Lizzy, before new Chief. Dis story about the old Chief, and 'bout old friends, and adventure, and stuff and things.

Way, way back, when waters lower and trees more green, me used to be young. Hard to believe, but take word for it. Young me was more tribe healer, less wise orc. Took care of Voodoo Engine when had to, but less smart orcs then. Less work get done.

Why? Old Chief of Jeywafa tribe was crazy. Not charge in battle alone crazy. Real crazy. He get so old dat he

forget stuff. Like give order. Or call for hunt. Or tell Voodoo Engine where to dig. He mostly just care for self.

Dat was OK back then. More nuts, stuff grow better, have bigger hunts. Life easier.

Still, many young warriors try to take over, not happy with doin' not much. Say Jeywafa tribe deserve better chief. But one big problem.

Chief dunno how to die.

He crazy with age, and confused lots. But old Chief come back when you kill him. It true! I know you look at me funny, but it true. He killed many times, guy thought he new head of clan. Then crazy old Chief charge back into village with tree branch and bash new guy's head in. One poor guy kill old Chief twice. He come back and find tent burned down with Chief dancing around near it. Kill old Chief once more, but then give up and move north before he come back again.

Nobody know how old Chief do it. Some dark whispers though. Say that he have pact with bad things. We forbid from talking about it.

Good part though. We get do whatever we want, and old Chief no care.

So me become adventurer!

Not big time stuff, never go too far. But do stuff that protect Jeywafa people. Always have help, Kenvunk no like me to go alone. Dat mean gotta find other crazy orc. Not crazy like Chief, crazy like me.

Sometimes me take couple bashers. Sometimes meet up with other tribes, is how I make so many friend outside village. But usually, I got buddy with me.

Buddy's name was Scire. Scire was trapper, hunter. Live in little hut in hills with wife, trade pelts and meats with three closest village. We joke dat Scire first orc ranger. But he actually \_believe\_ it.

Over many season, me and Scire do big-big things. We kill diseased Lizard of Deep Mucks. We find lost Grave of Tunnuk, legendary basher from second big war. Got so when folks have weird problem, dey come see us.

Dat's how we find out about Moaning Caves. Sometimes wish old woman never complain to Scire. Sometimes wish I never agree to go far north to help him look for stupid cave. But if wish was lizard, hobo never go hungry.

So us two go north, him with bow and me with sickle and rattle. Back then, me do some of Kenvunk's praying magic, but mostly small heal and fighting trick. Was young and stupid. But more brave. Not worry 'bout run in with harvest blade to chop things up.

In two day, we find cave. It right at place where swamp meet hills, but pretty far north. I never been dis far. Old lady was right, it seem to moan. And hiss. And make noises dat really not normal for hole in rock.

But worse was markings. All around opening, paint red like blood and green like pus. We both stand and stare at squiggles, but can no read.

Scire say, "You no read. I no read. Kenvunk read?"

I think 'bout it. "Maybe dere way. You gotta guard while I make smoke and pray though."

Scire say, "Yup. You start. You know I never let nothin' happen to you."

I want to remind buddy 'bout that time with angry monkey. Or time with angry snake. Or time with angry horse. But he mean well, so I just nod and start magic smoke.

I let stinky smoke drift around and eyes start to melt. Not out of head, just what I see. Me stand for half hour, letting red melt into green, back into red. Then I see. I see so clear that I gotta say out loud:

“Yvaroline the Banished.”

Right away, I hear angry hiss. It from best buddy. Scire no like words I say. Can't blame him.

Yvaroline the Banished was old orc god who got mixed up in demon world. He so bad, even bad gods and demons no play wit' him. When he try to kill other gods, they lock him up far away; on tall mountain that float in night sky. He so bad no orc even say name. Is forbidden in all culture, not even say as joke.

I sober up real quick. Scire stare at me, bow half drawn.

I explain, “Uhhh... me not say dat. Dat was Kenvunk who say.”

Scire grunted. Lowered bow.

We think for while. Not sure what rules are.

Scire ask, “We not allowed in? Or we \_gotta\_ go in? One or other.”

I nod. Agree, gotta be one or other. “Cast bones, let Kenvunk tell?”

Scire look relieved to make it god choice. “Yeah, cast bones.”

I throw bones in air.

Now, got big Shaman secret to tell. When cast bones, almost always know how gonna fall. Make up mind before, or Kenvunk whisper in ear before. So throw certain way and it land on right thing. I know we not supposed to go in, throw bones just so. When holy man cast bones, not really-

Scire stop my thinking and say, "Arrows. We go in."

I blink and say, "Ah, lizard crap."

Moans get quiet when get to cave mouth. I light torch with rough rock and piece of metal, then carry so Scire got hands free to shoot. What we see on cave wall make me wish never lit torch.

Every wall covered with face of old Chief. Whoever make them draw in coal or in pitch. Some face tiny, other huge. But dozens of old Chief face stare at us while we walk down tunnel. It really freaky.

Hear little hiss and stop. That sign. Mean Scire hear or smell somethin' and want to go first. I stay around corner to keep light away, let him get cave-vision back. After minute, he walk 'round next corner, real soft-like.

Scire do this often. But in bottom of stomach, always worry he not come back. Worry he get eaten. Sort of worry I get eaten too, but sad for friend if he get eaten first. So far, Scire always come back.

Hear another little hiss sound. Let out breath. Dat Scire saying he back. But in torch light, dark green orc look really pale, like eyes of blind fish. He jerk head back way we came, and we hurry out to afternoon sun.

Scire sit heavy on hillside next to where swamp muck start. He say, "Was a naga."



I feel spine turn to ice. "You sure?" I ask.

Naga are demon-snake-people. Part of each. But not enough demon to keep 'em off Panos, and not enough people where they very social. Plenty of snake though.

Scire swallow hard and nod. "Yeah. Chief's naga."

I knew stories from when I was baby. Be good or naga come eat you. If rotten, naga take soul and put in big rock. Then make pain on you forever, and you can't die. Just suffer. Not die.

I hissed, "You gone crazy. You think Chief make deal with demon snake? What he got to offer?"

Me wise, but Scire not live inside any village. He got outsider wisdom. "People. Anyone who make trouble. You know how orc vanish, we think they eat by lizards? What if..."

He not finish words. But my gut get all twisted. He right. I know he right.

I think 'bout how it probably work. Naga use power to bind Chief. As long as naga alive, Chief protected. When Chief die, soul go to Spirit Stone. Naga wait for body to reform. Instead of taking Chief, let him go cause Chief feed naga many body. Many soul.

I ask Scire, "What you wanna do?"

"We gotta kill it."

I stare at crazy buddy. "Kill naga?! How?"

Scire sound grim, "With arrow. With fire. With Kenvunk blessing. And with chopping stuff."

Me shake head. "You crazy! We go get help first."

Scire show wisdom again, “What if pictures can see, and Chief know? May have already killed self to get back to cave. What if naga smell and warn him? No. Gotta end dis now.”

I not like dese words. But know friend could be right. Yvaroline the Banished is trickster, so everything Scire say could happen. If we do dis, we do it now.

When I not say nothing, he say, “For tribes.”

I sigh, then nod. “For tribes.”

As head back to cave, feel arm on shoulder. “Give one shot in dark. Then bring fire.”

Back at cave, me let Scire go first. When see him move like dat, gotta think he real ranger. I shake, but he step smooth. No fear. Only hunt the prey.

Give him five paces, so torch only shine on butt. Leave Scire his cave eyes. We pass all da wall-Chiefs dat stare at us. He reach corner dat me no go ‘round yet.

Scire no basher, but dat bow need strong orc to use. Elf no able to even pull back. Arrows not like twig, not like human use. Like branches. Orc arrows.

Hear arrow fly. Then scream, like demon-snake touch sun. Scire charge ‘round corner, and I run after.

Blue-gold scale shine in light; least those not green with demon-lizard blood. Naga got snakey head, normal body, and it stand on thick snakey tail. Also got arrow in shoulder. It look angry. Not scared like me.

But something else shine too. Not ‘cause of torch. It shine on own. Sit in little stone cradle in far wall. Heavy, round

rock. Silver light throb like living heart. Naga see me eye rock, slither in da way. Dat's gotta be Spirit Stone.

Scire shoot next arrow, but snake ready. Catch huge arrow from air like nothing. Then spit back at archer. Thick green goop hit Scire in head, he barely cover eyes in time. Smell smoke in air, hear orc scream.

Me just keep charging. Legs feel like rubber, but gotta save Scire. Naga try stab me with arrow, but me make like short orc. Slide on knees and stick torch right where snake crotch should be.

Naga no like dat.

Smell roast snake before dat tail hit me. Then know what like to fly. Hit side wall of cave. Eyes go all funny. Not seen stars inside before.

Me try to get up. See Scire take turn. Musta broke string, would never use small axe if not. He still quick. Dodge swipecy claws. Dodge snappy teeth. Plant axe in naga ribs before he get tail-bashed. End up on far wall, slump by Spirit Stone.

I call on Kenvunk. He make moss sprout big vines. Tangling Plants try wrap all 'round snake. But snake got pretty sleek parts. Vine get arms and around middle. Curl over arrow and axe, then twist. Snake scream. But more green blood mean naga able to slither out.

Now it coming right at me. Gold eyes look angry. Me draw sickle and keep back to wall. Gonna see what parts come off dis thing.

Then hear weird sound. Like orc crush wet wasp hive. Naga eyes go white. Sound again, dis time with big green goo splash. Snake collapse at feet, hole in back of head.

Scire stand behind dead naga. Spirit Stone in his hand, still drip demon-snake blood. Blue glow start to go 'way. Dead naga mean dead demon magic. Soon just torch light cave.

He grab axe while me get breath back. I make ranger friend sit near torch. He look annoyed as I clean blood and goo from face. Call on Kenvunk to heal, make burns go away.

But something wrong.

Me take out cloth, wet it. Scrub at Scire's face. He look more annoyed, can't string broke bow while I shake his head.

Scire slap hands away, "Stop! Me fine."

Try to tell him, but can't. He see it in my face though.

He ask, "What? What wrong?"

Me swallows hard, "T-there mark on face. From naga spit."

Scire scowled, "Say what you mean. What mark?"

"Mark of Yvaroline."

Ranger shoulders slump. He know what dat mean. Mark of Yvaroline is curse, make people mad for no reason. Dey see mark, dey rage. Attack marked orc. Don't matter if covered. No priest can gets off.

"Shaman. I gots family."

I nods. "You live in hills in woods, maybe... just stay away?"

Scire snarl at me. He say, "Won't matter. Time pass. Even you start hate me. Wife will hate. New baby hate."



Sat quiet for while. Friend restring bow. Torch spark, start to fade.

Scire hand dead Spirit Stone over. Look like rock come from around village, not from cave. I clean with wet cloth and put in pack. Don't know what else to do. Don't know what to say.

Scire stand up and say, "Come on. You gotta tell old woman all OK."

We head out of cave. No more creepy Chiefs on wall. Just gray stone.

Once outside, gotta ask, "What you gonna do?"

"Take wife and baby somewhere safe. Where she can do weaving, get paid. I leave all things with them. Go off on own."

Me sigh. "She gonna let you leave, no follow?"

Scire voice break when he say, "Just gonna I-leave. No tell her."

Me nod. Already feel it though. That hate. Hate for friend. Mark of Yvaroline work fast.

Still, hold out gray-green hand. He take in deep green one. One squeeze, then Scire gone.

Back at Jeywafa village, not tell no one 'bout Scire. Few days later, brash young orc call Chief out. Take head off with sawtoothed sword. I know dis time, crazy old Chief no come back. We gots new Chief now.

New Chief say things different now. Orc work hard. Train many smart orc for Voodoo Engine. Tribe gonna plant, and mine, and grow. No more adventure. Me just say yes. After

naga... after Scire, no wanna adventure no more. Stay home, train young orc. Give life to Kenvunk, to tribe.

Couple week later, big storm. Tent leak, wind blow cold. No sleep good. As lay half awake on pelts, lightning flash. See big orc shape, stand over cot.

As sit up, hand go over mouth to stop scream. Another flash, see face right in my face. Worn face. Marked face.

“Quiet. Boy’s asleep.”

Scire slide rough hand from my mouth. I no scream. Say, “What you do here? Should be long gone. Dangerous!”

Reply so soft. So calm. “Nowhere to go. Mob chased us in hills. Wife dead.”

Me choke up. Say, “Scire. So s-sorry.”

“Boy cold. Put under furs.”

Felt wet bundle pressed to chest. Was instinct. Took baby, put under blanket with me.

In dark, Scire say, “You gotta take care of him now.”

“Me? Scire, dunno how to-”

Ranger cut off. He say, “Boy dead wit’ me. You smart. You wise. You owe Scire.”

Want to say no to first things. Can’t deny last thing.

“I’ll try.”

Feel hand grip shoulder, hard. Then nothing. Next flash let me catch last look at friend as he walk into storm.

Days after, hear about patrol. Dey kill orc when see forbidden Mark on him. Say he fought like demon. Sound

about right.

So up to me now. Gotta raise boy. Get help from older tribe women. Get help from two orc women lost their babies. Tribe raise boy. But he smart orc, so spend much time here, with me.

Remember day before gonna teach boy first magic. He run up to me, look sad. Ask why.

Young Sorch say, "Chief say should always carry rock. Good for throw. For bash. Lotsa stuff and things. Can't find good rock."

I say, "Come to tent."

Boy follow me. Dig through old trunk until I find it. Last thing I got of Scire's. Last, 'cept for boy.

Spirit Stone still round and heavy. No glow, no power. But mean more to me than dat.

Me explain, "Dis is Rock. You take Rock wit' you. Rock from right here in village, but travel many days. Seen much power. You can has Rock, if promise to take care of."

Sorch look at Rock, wide eyes. "Me take care of Rock, Shaman. Promise!"

Watch as boy run from tent wit' new friend. Tomorrow training start. He learn to feed Voodoo Engine. But right now, let him and Rock play. Jus' fer one more day.