

LABYRINTH

(The Legend of the Crystal)

Geoff Davies

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Labyrinth

Prologue

They played in the fields, the forest too,
Two princes, young and free.
Each armed with a sword, but made of wood
From the hardest and strongest tree.

Each hid from his friend amongst bushes and vines
They practiced their skills at tracking.
Then battles occurred as they discovered each one
They were fighters in the making.

On one fine day the one called Mark
Ventured afar from his friend.
He discovered a mound in the surrounding land
Covered with brambles and thicket.

He scrambled around and lost the ground
Tumbling into a hollow.
He raised himself up upon his feet
His eyes the surroundings did follow.

He looked about to find a way back
And espied something dark and looming.
'Twas the mouth of cave of two men's height
Gloomy yet somehow inviting.

The floor of the cave was littered with twigs
And branches from bushes and trees.
Stepping forward a pace he stopped in his tracks
As his face felt the rush of a steady cool breeze.

It was dark in the cave and he ventured not far
But returned he to the hollow.
A little nervous he felt and decided right then
To return to the cave on the 'morrow.

Scrambling up to the mound he looked about
But no sign of his friend did he see.
He called out his name then spied his friend Jon
On the branch of a very tall tree.

Jon had climbed up on high, well out of sight
When Mark was nowhere around.
He surprised his friend and jumped to the ground
And suggested they continue the fight.

Mark declined the invite to continue the game
And mentioned the cave in the thicket.
His friend was excited and agreed with the plan
To return the next day with a visit.

The following day they were back at the cave
With lamps to light up their passage.
The cave was not deep but the back wall was smooth
Like a door to an underground chamber.

They looked for a way to move the great rock
But found neither handle nor hinges.
Then Mark noticed the slots around the slab
And they pondered on their meaning.

They soon forgot the hidden cave
And grew into strong young men.
They became employed by a powerful king
Remaining together as brethren.

Goblins

The skills they hold are forever told
Their products of good reputation.
They work with rocks, crystals and gold
For their customers' satisfaction.

They extract the wealth from caverns so deep
Where no man would ever venture.
They carry their wealth to the surface above
To their eagerly awaiting craftsmen.

Then one day they beheld a cave
With access so restricted.
But when they broke through after hours of toil
The sight made them stand affixed.

A dazzling light did meet their eyes.
The cave was full of crystals.
A carpet of stones lay far and wide.
A treasure and more besides.

The cavern was long, the light grew brighter
They picked valuable stones on the way.
Until they reached the end of the cave
Where the light was as bright as day.

A goblin then shouted out with glee
"Comrades, just look what I can see."
A plinth upon a columnar rock
They espied a crystal laying on top.

The crystal emitted a pure white light
With a strength beyond their dreams.
It also possessed an attractive force
The goblins struggled to fight.

Most resisted and held their ground
Fearful of its power.
Others succumbed to the beauty ahead
Their defenses dangerously lower.

Slowly the numbers dwindled away
With a single goblin approaching,
At the column he reached out his hand
To the others he was visibly shaking.

“Stop it” cried one “touch it but not
Its powers can be catastrophic”.
“How would you know” said the goblin so close
“When we have never seen it?”

“In books of old, so I am told,
And written in the scriptures.
It also appears in runes of the north
Of a being who used to own it.

The being was good with kindness and love
And imbued it was with its powers.
The being was slain but its powers remained
Held within the crystal.

Its power is meant for the honest and bold
Who have the strength to control it.
It can be a force for good and peace
But destructive force it can release.

For those who are evil the crystal controls
And guides them to destruction.
For those of weak mind who handle the stone
Death will be their salvation.”

The lone goblin demurred and held his hand back
Then he made a decision.
He grasped the stone, let out a moan
And his body started shaking.

He opened his hand but the crystal remained
The light snaking through his body.
He screamed and convulsed, his body in pain
Whilst the others watched in horror.

His body aflame, the others turned round
And kept their eyes to the floor.
The screaming then stopped, the goblin was gone
Consumed by the powers he yearned for.

The others sat down, their colleague was gone
The crystal now back on its column.
It continued to pulse its pure white light
The goblins had suffered a terrible fright.

“The crystal must rest where protection is best”
Said the goblin who spoke before.
They agreed they must move it
To somewhere secluded and visible no more.

The goblins sort the King of the Elves
Whose knowledge knew no bounds.
Where to hide the crystal rock
They’d discovered underground.

“I know of such a dreadful place
That no man nor elf would go.”
The King replied with trepidation.
“Ne’er wish upon a foe.”

“Please tell us how to get there”
The goblins asked with glee.
“I’ll take you there myself” said Elf
“Just two of you and me.”

“Bring the crystal to the glade
Inside the Elfin Wood.
But evil men will seek it out
Hide it well you should.”

The goblins in the cavern
Thought hard ‘bout how they could
Transport the magic crystal
To the glade in Elfin Wood.

“We have to make a casket”
Said a goblin old and wise.
“It has to be from solid rock
The crystal it to hide.”

The goblins found a piece of rock
Of suitable dimension.
To fashion like an upturned cup
This was their planned intention.

Chisels, hammer blows rang out
That echoed through the cavern.
When all was done they took the cup
To the crystal then to cover up.

From physical and mental strain
The goblins fell exhausted.
The power of the crystal
So much had they resisted.

They cut the column's plinth away
Two goblins one each side.
They carried the precious casket
From the cavern for to hide.

They took it to the Elfin Wood
To the glade as so instructed.
The goblins put the casket down
With the crystal well protected.

Labyrinth (Part 1)

The Elf King, elves and goblins
Began a journey long.
The elves were armed with weapons
To fight off evil ones.

Finally, a grassy mound
Appeared in their sights.
The Elf King said "We're here at last.
This is where the labyrinth starts".

"Now two of you accompany me
The rest return back home.
We'll take the crystal to a place
Where dangers lurk that none will face.

The Elf King started forward
With two goblins and their crystal.
They came upon the hidden cave
In an area so quiet and still.

Inside the cave they found a door
Smooth rock, no means to open.
But slots arranged around the edge
The goblins posed a question.

“What now Elf King?” the goblins asked
“How do we get inside?”
The Elf King drew his golden sword
And pondered for a while.

“The sword’s inserted in a slot
The door will always open.
But one will keep the door unlocked
The rest mean suffocation.”

The goblins feared for their lives
Worried by the statement.
The Elf King walked up to the door
To view each indentation.

After many minutes passed
He pushed the sword inside a slot.
Sliding sideways did the door
“I hope I’m right or we’ll be no more.”

Another cavern met their eyes
The sight filled them with dread.
When they looked upon the ground
They saw remains of the dead.

The goblins said “We’ll not go in”.
But Elf King stepped into the cave.
He turned around and smiled at them
“And there I thought that you were brave.”

The goblins entered with their load
The floor was dusty, strewn with bones.
The Elf King kicked them all aside
“They chose the wrong slot, henceforth died.”

The cave was round, the walls so smooth.
Apart from one spot they espied
Just above two deep set grooves
Two levers level and side by side..

“Goblins grab each one”, said Elf
“And pull them down the grooves therein.
If I chose the correct door slot
The labyrinth now will let us in.”

The goblins looked at each askance
Dare they pull and take the chance.
“Come” said Elf “let’s both be brave.
I can’t believe you’re still afraid.”

The goblins pulled the levers down
‘Twas followed by a grating sound.
Between the levers did appear
A recessed doorway. “It is here!”

Said the Elf King pushing hard.
The door slid back and also then
The first door slid to close them in.
“Now we’re trapped” one goblin said.

“Do not fret but just stay calm”
The Elf King took them arm-in-arm.
“The door will open when we leave
Our purpose now we must achieve.”

The cave was now completely dark.
“Expose the crystal” Elf King stated.
The goblins did as they were told
And removed the cover they had crafted.

At once the light revealed a passage
The walls around absorbed the light.
The Elf King led them down an incline
The goblins looking left and right.

They passed a row of weird creatures
Chiselled hard into the rock.
The goblins stared at one another
“Fret not; us, they will not bother.

The labyrinth holds yet many secrets
Hazards, threats along the way.
But we are on a noble mission
But onward, we must not delay”.

The three continued down the passage
‘Till they reached a three-way split.
“Which way Elf King?” asked the goblins
“Bring the light up; do be quick.”

Goblins raised the crystal’s platter
Into each wing was it held.
Only one did walls then sparkle
“This left hand passage we must tackle.”

The passage opened to a cavern
The path before them was no more.
A gaping void lay before them
At the edge they stood afore.

“What now?” asked goblins to the Elf King
“This is the wrong way to be sure.”
“Have faith” said Elf King “Keep on walking.
For honest folk there is much more.

For what you see, your eyes deceive you
Tests the courage and faith you have.
Those with strength, determination
Succeed when heart is full of love.”

The goblins stepped into the void
Felt firm ground beneath their feet.
A bridge began to form whilst walking
Now gone behind them, slowly fading.

Soon they crossed the deep, dark void
Thankfully reached the other side.
The walls ahead they glittered strongly
Now the path began to rise.

Onward trudged the weary goblins
Carrying their precious load.
The Elf King used his elfin knowledge
Guiding them towards their goal.

At length they reached a giant cavern
The floor was strewn with nuggets gold.
In the centre stood a dais
The air around them very cold.

“Do not be tempted by the treasure”
Said Elf King with a warning clear.
“For those that do will live forever
But every day they’ll live in fear.

Upon the dais place the crystal
From the casket made of stone.”
They raised it up and felt the power
Of the crystal’s light that shone.

“Now we leave this place so sacred
Whilst the walls still hold the light.
Soon they’ll fade and lose their brightness
The way will then be dark as night.”

Elf King, goblins left the labyrinth
‘Till they reached the inner door.
Closing it released the outer
Open to the world once more.

“Now our journey’s finally over
The crystal’s power safe once more.”
Elf King bade the goblins farewell
Left them holding him in awe.

Now their task was truly over
The crystal safe from evil minds.
Their heartfelt thanks they gave the Elf King
Then returned back to their kind.

Years passed by with many changes
Saw rulers rise and rulers fall.
Two great kings became ascendant
Goblins fortunes did befall.

Two Kings

The Lord of Light and The Lord of Dark
They ruled the world between them.
Their battles were bloody; their armies were strong,
But neither was triumphant

One King was honest, fair to all men
Known as the Lord of Light.
The other a ruthless power seeker
The Lord of Dark was full of fight.

The Lord of Light was noble and good,
His people well contented.
They built their homes and tilled the soil
Enjoyed their lives with pleasure and toil.

The Lord of Dark enjoyed the wealth,
That power brings to some men.
A devious man, there were none who would dare
Challenge this Lord in his kingdom.

Now the daughter of the Lord of Light,
Her name was Princess Mirelda.
She was beautiful, pure, bold and gay,
Desired by men who beheld her.

Her eyes shone bright like the moon at night.
Her blonde hair was long and like silk.
Her lips compared to a bright red rose.
Her pale skin smooth as velvet.

The love for Mirelda knew no bounds,
Especially from her people.
Their devotion to her was set in their souls.
They would willingly do her bidding.

The Lord of the Dark, he had a son,
With his father's thirst for power.
A fearless fighter if ever there was,
There were none he could not devour.

His name was Hadj, a fearsome man,
A cunning expert swordsman.
Handsome but grim, well built but trim.
No one would dare to face him.

Mirelda was known, to the Dark Lord Hadj,
Who desired this gentle maiden.
Determined to have her for himself
Even by summoning Satan.

Now two old goblins fell on hard times
Each followed his separate way.
One found service with the Lord of Light
The other in the Dark Lord's pay.

The Dark Lord he had his favourites
He rewarded them with wealth.
The common man and others
Survived with guile and stealth.

The goblin in the Dark Lord's pay
Slaved in mines with pick and spade.
But then he thought of all the riches
So with the Dark Lord he would trade.

He let be known to the Dark Lord's men
Of a secret to enthrall.
To make the Lord, their master,
The most powerful man of all.

The Dark Lord summoned the goblin
To hear what he would say.
"I know the road to power
But for this you'll have to pay."

The goblin told him of the crystal
Hidden underground.
The Lord said "If this a falsehood
In chains you'll soon be bound."

"The ultimate source of power and wealth
Is a crystal that lies in a labyrinth.
To possess it, 'tis said, would bestow upon you
Immortality and life everlasting.

The labyrinth is dark, a perilous place
That harbours many hazards.
No one would dare to enter there
To share the fate of others."

Goblin's tale convinced the Lord
He told him how they found it.
He told them of the Elf King's help
The crystal to hide in the labyrinth.

The Dark Lord said "I want this stone
To give me the power I seek.
To rule this world in the way I wish
The Lord of Light I must defeat."

“To get the stone” the goblin said
“The Elf King will guide your knights there.
But they must be men of honour
Loyal and true and fair”.

The Lord sat back and pondered
About what he had to do.
“I’ll give you gold a plenty
But honest men are few.”

“What about the Lord of Light?
He has two knights so bold.
They are both loyal and very true
Most honest men I’m told.”

“We’ll need their help to lead us there
They will not come I do surmise.
If there is no other way
We must persuade them otherwise.

The Light King has a daughter
He loves with all his heart.
He guards her more than anyone
No time are they apart.”

The goblin nodded to the King
“I see your meaning sire.
By trading her for knightly help
You’ll have what you desire.”

The Dark King took the goblin’s arm
“Just see what you can do.
Then you’ll have your freedom
With gold and servants too.”

Abduction of Mirelda

Hadj then took six trusty men
To the lands of the Lord of Light.
They watched the princess riding out
And her habits day and night.

And then one day when riding out
With three knights keeping watch.
The six men fell upon the troupe
The princess they did snatch.

The three knights fought so boldly
To protect their dear princess.
Swords clashed so hard the forest rang
As they slowly yielded to the gang.

The good knights finally overcome
One wounded in the arm.
Laid down their swords by order
The princess wished them no harm.

The six men took Mirelda
To the Dark Lord's land so far.
"Now we'll see how much she's loved
When we bargain with her honour."

The Lord of Light he heard the news
From the three knights true and bold.
He thanked them for their efforts
The whole court, they were told.

The Dark Lord sent a message
To the Lord of Light next day.
“You’ll help me find a crystal
In a labyrinth not far away.”

The two Lords met on neutral ground
The Lord of Light was vexed.
“Release my daughter right away
Or you will rue this day.”

“Threaten me not” the Dark Lord said
“This is no normal stone.
It resides in a place where no mortal will venture
But consider it an exciting adventure.

But enough of this talk, we’re wasting time
I believe you’re not so dumb.
Find this jewel and deliver to me
Then your daughter shall have her freedom.”

The Lord of the Light was very perplexed
Reluctant to do his bidding.
“What is it, this crystal that thou so desires
And where does it lie so hidden?”

“It lies in a labyrinth so evil and dark
Where many a man has perished.
It was treasured by me for its beauty and shine
‘Till the Goblins and Elves didst steal it.”

He was lying of course and the Light Lord was angry
“Why don’t you retrieve it yourself?”
“I do have knights who are willing to go
But trust them? I regret I must say no.”

“Rather than that” the Light Lord said
“You’ll release my daughter at once.
If she’s not released by the end of the day
My army will shortly be on its way.”

The Dark Lord responded in mocking tone
“Do not invade my lands.”
“Else you will suffer utter grief
And Mirelda’s life will be but brief.”

Two Princes

The Light Lord seethed with anger
Returning home with woe.
But when his court were told the news
Two princes stepped forth to go.

The Lord of Light was thankful
And cautioned the undertaking.
“It’s a perilous task you are about to start
Good luck with the journey you’re making.

But what of this labyrinth he spoke about
How will you seek its location?”
The princes described its find in their youth
During a friendly altercation.

The two knights referred to their boyhood.
“We played in the forest afar.
Discovered a cave with its entrance well hidden
With an inscription which read *Entry Forbidden.*”

The Lord of Light from what he heard
Wished them luck to their success.
“God speed you on your journey
But firstly you must get some rest”.

The two princes set off the following day
In eager anticipation.
They’d prepared themselves for the dangers ahead
With hope in their vital mission.

As they neared the cave they had found
When playing in the forest.
They rested that night as the moon shone bright
The morrow to be tested.

Elf King

Awakened they were in the dead of night
When a mist descended around them.
“What omen is this?” said Mark to his friend
Grabbing swords they prepared for a fight.

Out of the mist there stepped a tall man
Clothed in green with pointed ears.
“I am the Elf King of this land
If you are lost, then help you I can.

But put down your weapons” the Elf King said
“Have no fear, I wish you no harm.
I wonder your purpose within these my woods
You seem to have travelled so far.”

“We seek out a labyrinth” said Jon to the King
“To retrieve a crystal so bright.
‘Tis needed to save the life of Mirelda
The daughter of the Lord of Light.”

The Elf King then told them the tale of the crystal
And warned them of its powers.
“It brings life everlasting to those who are good
But for those who are bad it devours.

I will willingly help you to rescue the maid
But when your deed is done.
Return the crystal to its home
Or your king will lose his throne.”

“Do you know of this labyrinth?” The Elf King asked.
The princes replied “We do.”
“Be aware of the hazards that you will face
With that, I’ll help you through.

In order to test your courage and skill
I will relate to you a riddle.
Solve it to reach a secret cave
Where the crystal doth stand in the middle.”

The princes then heard the Elf King’s words
To understand their meaning.
They made not much sense to either man
At the end their minds were reeling.

“Inside a cave with a dusty floor
You must search for a hidden door.
Slots exist that aid your entry
The answer is quite elementary.

*Upper right; it has a twin
Level left will let you in.”*

The Elf King spoke of a second door
“Take note at what I say.
You will find two levers
To help you on your way.

But do take note for you will find
The outer door will close behind.
Use the wrong slots on the first door
Then daylight will you see no more.”

The Elf King spoke of tests to come
And continued with the riddle.
“It tells of hazards five in all
Survive them all to reach the hall
To seize the magic crystal.”

The Riddles

*“The walls have eyes, the walls have ears
Protect your fronts, but more, your rears.
Do take note to what I’ve said
But most of all don’t lose **your** head.*

*Your way ahead becomes confused
Like endless deserts and sandy dunes.
Yet fret not, you have a choice
The answer’s in the runes.*

The Elf King sat upon a rock
And handed them some nectar.
“Drink this before test number four
When you reach a lakeside shore.”

The princes thanked the seated Elf
To share their food they did agree.
He declined and thanked them kindly
“Now for riddle number three.

*When you reach a massive cavern
With high roof and darkest depths.
You will find the path seems ended
But do not look for where to tread;
Believe and follow the path ahead.*

Next we reach the lake of water
Calm and shallow, cool and clear
Now drink the nectar, have no fear.

*Blood lust dwells within these waters
Creatures seek to quench their thirst.
You will feel a strong temptation
But strike them back and they'll do their worst.”*

Elf King paused and watched the princes
Memorizing one to four.
“Now the last and final challenge
Possibly the worst of all.”

Elf King took a sip of nectar
“Hall of Mirrors is the test.
*In this hall you'll find eight mirrors
All but one will give no rest.*

*Each reflects the crystal's image
Believe not what you wish to see.
All false portals end in tears
You need to face your own worst fears.*

Now I leave you two great princes
May the Gods support your quest.
Take these lamps to light your way
Then you will not go astray.

The lamps will light your way to the crystal
And then they will expire.
Use the crystal's light, to find your way out
A new route will transpire.

You will find the crystal in a cavern
With a cap of polished stone.
Remember to use it to cover the light
When you exit the underground.

Princes thanked him for his kindness
But he gave a final warning
“Beware, the crystal is alive
One of you may not survive.”

Once the Elf King's mist did clear
Jon and Mark were left alone.
“Now we rest until the morning
The path ahead we have been shown.”

Unbeknown to the two young princes
The Lord of Darkness sent a team
Of twenty knights and led by Hadj
Who had in mind an evil scheme.

Their task to track the princes' journey
Through the labyrinth to the cave.
Where the crystal shone its brightest
The sparkling stone the Dark Lord craved.

They would slay the two young princes
As instructed by their King.
His plan to keep Princess Mirelda
And defeat their foe: her father.

Labyrinth (Part 2)

Jon and Mark they found the hollow
Remembered it from younger days.
Stepped inside the gloomy cavern
Somewhat lit by the bright sun's rays.

They reached the door with slots around
But saw high crossed ones left and right.
Horizontals linked the top ones
Verticles at sides to ground.

Remembering now, the Elf King's warning,
They took their swords and lifted high.
Jon used the right one as instructed
And Mark the left with watchful eye.

The door slid open with grinding stone
Revealed a chamber dark and cold.
Many bones they lay about
From failed attempts of old.

They then approached the second door
And used the levers as instructed.
The outer door then closed behind them
As the Elf King had predicted.

The Rock Men

The second door opened with grinding sound
The princes were enthralled.
A corridor, wide, lay there before them
Lit by bright gems in the walls.

The light from the gems did seem to blink
As the dusty path did rise.
Then Mark said to Jon “Observe you the gems.
They look like pairs of eyes”.

All of a sudden, the walls did move
And shapes did slowly emerge.
They were stone men with hammers
And around them many did surge.

The hammers they swung through the air at the two
Narrowly missing their prey.
The princes, they dodged the savage blows
To survive, Jon said “Fight and pray”.

With princes now standing back-to-back
Their swords just clanging on stone.
They now remembered what Elf King had said
About not losing *one's head*.

Mark said to Jon "Let's aim at their necks,
That was the Elf King's clue."
Dodging the hammers they swung their swords
Hitting targets hard and true.

The stone men collapsed in piles of rocks
Their gem eyes blinking out.
The princes were winning it seemed to them both
'Til Jon heard from Mark a shout.

A hammer had hit him a glancing blow
And grazed him on the arm.
Jon glanced at his friend with much concern
And saw he had come to no harm.

Slowly the stone men returned to the walls
Ceasing their vicious attack.
The princes returned swords to their scabbards
And continued along the track.

Three Ways

The cavern seemed long and endless
To continue, they both did agree.
Finally reaching a wide open space
The path was now split into three.

The princes pondered which route to take
And then remembered the runes.
Symbols above each corridor
Told them which one to choose.

The left ‘ \mathbb{M} ’ meant hope and happiness
The middle ‘ Γ ’ chaos, unknown.
The right ‘ \lessdot ’ mortality and pain
For them it was all too plain.

They followed the path as it rose up and down
Until it reached a great cavern.
The path ended abruptly with no way to cross
A deep, dark yawning chasm.

Tracking the princes close behind
A scout from the twenty knights
Observed their actions in the cave
By keeping them in his sights.

The Dark Lord’s knights passed through the doors
To the cavern of twinkling gems.
The stone men emerged from within the walls
Swinging hammers at each of them.

Swords were swung with no effect
With the clanging of steel on stone.
Two knights were crushed and petrified
Then Hadj let out a groan.

“Flee we must or we’ll all be killed.”
They each fled from the cavern.
They ran down the track away from the cave
Deeper into the labyrinth.

The Void

The princes recalled the second riddle
The dilemma they faced they could not avoid.
“But the path is before us” said Mark to his friend
As he stepped into the void.

Jon uttered a cry when Mark stepped out
Fearing he’d lost his comrade.
“Just keep walking ahead” said Mark to his friend
“In your mind will the path be made.”

When Jon stepped out, a narrow path formed
As he walked it did slowly appear.
Behind him it faded out of sight
But ahead it remained quite clear.

They finally reached the end of the path
Over the dark depths below.
They rested a while at the mouth of a cave
The tunnel ahead did they follow.

The knights of the Dark Lord now eighteen strong
Reached the choice of three ways ahead.
They noted the symbols above each path
But knew not what they said.

They studied the symbols above the three tunnels.
And tried to interpret their meaning.
The left, they thought, must mean *don't enter*
Thus right or middle they must venture.

The middle suggested to *Go this way*
The right seemed to point to the middle.
“We’ll take each tunnel to check them out”
Said Hadj “to solve this riddle.”

Hadj then chose three pairs from his crew
And dispatched them down each tunnel.
“Report back to me whatever you see
Then we must take a gamble.”

Two knights took the right but after a while
They found that the tunnel narrowed.
The one in the lead was five paces ahead
Of the other knight that followed.

All of a sudden a grating fell down
Trapping the first knight inside.
They both seized the grating to lift it up
But couldn’t, how much they tried.

Movement was heard deep in the cave
And a dozen vile creatures appeared.
The knight drew his sword to fight them off
For his life the other knight feared.

The creatures then floored him and dragged him away
He was screaming for help not forthcoming.
The other ran back the way they had come
To report the demise of their fellow.

The middle two were walking together
Drawn swords within their hands.
An uneven floor lay beneath their feet
'Til a smooth slab of stone did they meet.

“'Tis strange” said one “to find the
Floor so regular and smooth.”
But then they found to their amazement
The ground began to move.

The floor dropped down to cause
The two to fall into a pit.
One broke his ankle from the fall
To their colleagues they did call.

Hadj heard the distant call for help
It echoed down the tunnel.
He sent some men to help them out
But they shook their heads and turned about.

“Where are my men?” Hadj then asked.
“A pit so deep they fell in.
Unless we find a long strong rope
The prognosis will be grim.”

“We’ll rescue them later” Hadj replied
“So let us continue our journey.
We must keep up with the princes two
Else our future we will rue.”

They took the tunnel on the left
When the two scouts did return.
They told the leader all looked clear
Some now felt a little less fear.

Giant Leeches

The princes now reached the underground lake
Which stretched for many a yard.
With waters dark but not too deep
This was the path they must take.

The princes drank the nectar
Approached the waters cool.
Removed their shoes and stockings
And stepped into the pool.

At first the waters remained quite calm
As they commenced their steady advance.
But as they waded further in
There were ripples of a disturbance.

Large shapes were gliding through the depths
Towards the wading two.
They felt a slight sucking on their flesh
But react, they knew not to do.

Soon the creatures detached themselves
The princes espied their features.
Long and black they swam away
They looked like giant leeches.

“They didn’t like the taste of us”
Stated Mark in disbelief.
“It must be the nectar in our blood”
Said Jon with some relief.

Hall of Mirrors

The two continued on their path
To meet the final challenge.
The track was narrow so Mark then led
Until they spied a light ahead.

He suddenly stopped and grabbed his sword
“What is it that you see?” asked Jon.
“I see a knight, he comes this way
That he’s friendly let’s hope and pray.”

Jon then strained to see past Mark
With a little apprehension.
“That’s no knight but ‘tis a door
And that is your reflection.”

The princes reached the mirror door
And pushed it open wide.
They stared in wonder at what they saw
A maze of mirrors met the eye.

The walked along the mirror room
Not sure of what to do.
When Jon touched one, his hand went in
“Only one must we pass through.”

They stood before each one in turn
A hazy mist was present.
The foreground showed them side by side
But backgrounds were all different.

One showed a cavern of sparkling jewels
Another showed a swamp.
A third a garden filled with beauty
The fourth a torture chamber.

The fifth showed steppes so bare and barren
The sixth an island filled with palms.
The next a castle mystical
The last a deep dark forest.

Each scene showed a shining light
From a crystal there to take.
“Which is the true one?” Jon asked Mark
“That’s the choice we have to make.”

The Elf King’s words came back to them
‘What is it they most fear?’
“It must be two or five” said Jon
“That much I feel is clear.”

Mark spoke his mind about Jon’s words
“I must agree with you.
Of the choice of mirrors you have made
I think it’s number two.

One, three and seven would seem no threat
The fourth we’d take a fighting stance.
Six and eight could be a challenge
And for five plan in advance.

For two I see no solid earth
Just swampland all about.
An endless stretch of water
With one way in and no way out.”

Now the Dark Knights reached the chasm
With no way seen to cross.
A narrow ledge around the wall
One man tried but soon did fall.

The leader, Hadj, approached the edge
To view the depths below
“This path is wrong” he told his men
“There is nowhere to go.”

As he stared into the depths
A shimmering path appeared.
“There is magic in this cavern.
It is not as we all feared.”

“Have faith my men” Hadj then called out.
As each stepped off the ledge.
A path then formed ahead of them
Then faded as they went.

The last man’s faith was not so strong
The path he could not see.
When he stepped into the void
Death welcomed him with glee.

“The foolish man” Hadj told his men
“He did not have the faith
In what the rest of us believed
The path ahead his eyes deceived.”

The remaining knights now thirteen strong
Continued on their way.
“We must take care” Hadj then said
“Else many more will end up dead.”

The princes pondered long and hard
Which mirror door to pass through.
They thought the swamp the greatest threat
Approached the door and through it stepped.

Another tunnel met their eyes
Which curved round to the right.
As they walked around the bend
Their eyes met a dazzling light.

The tunnel ended in a cave
About two men in height.
In the centre sat a crystal
They'd never seen one so bright.

The crystal beckoned, drew them near
Mark warned "Jon, do take care.
Remember what the Elf King said
The strength of its power we must beware."

It sat upon a polished plinth
On a columnar of stone.
Its power radiated
Like a King upon a throne.

The crystal now two feet away
The temptation there was great.
To hold the crystal in one's hand
Would then map out one's fate.

Now Hadj's men approached the pond
So dark and calm it seemed.
But on their minds as they stepped forth
Was power and wealth they dreamed.

Once all the men were wading through
Some movement could be seen.
Shapes were gliding through the depths
They then heard one man scream.

They saw their colleague sword in hand
A giant leech upon him.
It sucked the fluids through his flesh
Just skin and bone the creature left.

Others felt the leeches sucking at their legs
Some tried to stab them with their swords.
But were dragged down in the water
Four more men did leeches slaughter.

Haj then warned them “Keep on wading
Do not react, they’re only tasting.
Try to kill them, they’ll fight back
And leave your body like an empty sack.”

Nine men left the water
Red blotches on their legs.
They continued down the cavern
To find out what lay ahead.

Jon felt the power draw him close
To the crystal within his reach.
“I feel such strength” he said to Mark
“This must not reach the Lord of Dark.”

Jon took the plinth within his hands
A grinding noise they heard.
A passage opened to their right
The crystal pulsed and glowed so bright.

The Dark Lord's men proceeded on
The leader, Hadj, ahead.
One man shouted "A knight dost come!"
"Tis my reflection, fool" Hadj said.

They entered the Hall of Mirrors
Having passed through the mirror door.
They examined the mirror doorways
And thought they'd first try four.

"Two shall take each doorway
To search what lies behind.
"When you see the crystal
Report back on what you find."

The first two entered the garden
One waited, the other went forth.
On a plinth in a pond in the centre
Was the crystal surrounded by water.

To reach the crystal he had to pass
Through an arbour of roses and vines.
He picked up the crystal and headed back
But the vines grew across his track.

They circled round his body
Tightening their grip.
Soon he fell unconscious
And died on his one-way trip.

The crystal vanished from his grasp
As though it had never been there.
His companion returned through the mirror
To Hadj with the tale of despair.

Hadj, he nodded slowly
“It must be a decoy” he said.
“Let’s hope the others have better luck
Now that another is dead.”

Of the two to visit the castle
One approached the gates alone.
“Your mission?” called a voice from the gatehouse
“I seek to bargain for your crystalline stone.”

“You’ll have no crystal” the answer came
“But here is something instead.”
Someone shot an arrow towards him
Which embedded itself in his head.

His companion returned to others
To report the death of the man.
“Another decoy” Hadj shouted out
“No part of this mission is going to plan.”

Of the next two assigned to the island
One took a boat that was left by the shore.
He collected the crystal from its location
And started back full of elation.

But halfway back on his journey
A tentacle reached into the boat.
It pulled them both in the water
There was nothing left afloat.

Hadj was now feeling despondent
“Three more men have we lost.
There is something not right with these mirrors
My decision proved wrong, to our cost.”

He summoned the remaining six men
“Which is the one that is true?
Perhaps we should check an unlikely one
Our previous logic was obviously wrong.

They considered the swamp the most dangerous
With its creatures and hazards unknown.
They stepped through the door with hearts pounding
Rather careless they’d grown.

They entered a tunnel that curved to the right
It grew slowly brighter and voices were heard.
They saw Jon holding the source of the light
A dazzling crystal on a plinth in his hand.

The princes turned round as they entered
Saw six men with swords in their hands.
“Hand over the crystal” Hadj gloatingly said
“Else die by the sword where you stand.”

Jon laid down the crystal to extract his sword
Mark joined him to fend off the attack.
The fighting was hard and vicious
The princes were beaten back.

Mark injured one of the six knights
Another fell to the ground.
The princes were winning the battle
But their luck then turned around.

Hadj now joined in the battle
His strength came into play.
They slowly drove the princes back
Who were losing the affray.

Hadj noticed the crystal within his reach
Now it was his for the taking.
He grabbed at the stone with its blinding light
Now this would be his making.

As soon as he touched the crystal
A blinding flash occurred.
A flaming light coursed through his body
Which convulsed as his screams were heard.

The crystal consumed him as like an inferno
His remaining knights were stunned.
They turned on their heels, swords still in their hands
And retreated the way they had come.

The princes were shocked at what they observed
The Elf King had warned them of this.
The crystal has powers no man can control
The world's evil ones nemesis.

Rescue of Mirelda

Jon picked up the plinth and Mark the cap
They stepped into the tunnel that had opened up.
They discovered stone steps that led up high
After an arduous climb they soon saw the sky.

It opened out on a mountain ledge
The vista they found exceptional.
“Now we must find a way to get down”
Said Jon as he covered the crystal.

The crystal casket Jon placed in his bag
And then they made their descent.
On reaching the bottom they headed back home
And met with Elf King to seek his assent.

“Do take care when you take the crystal
To rescue the Princess Mirelda.
The Dark Lord’s intentions are evil, I know
But he’ll suffer from having held her.

Your destinies reside within that crystal
The fate of mankind rests with you.
Whatever the outcome, what actions you take
Will be courageous, selfless and true.”

The princes thanked the Elf King
For his clear and sound advice.
Now they approached the land of the Dark Lord
A treacherous place full of vice.

The Elf King then went to the Lord of Light
And spoke of Hadj’s attack.
The Light Lord responded with anger
And raised a large army to fight.

The princes arrived at the Dark Lord’s castle
To fulfil their obligation.
The Dark Lord and knights, with Mirelda,
Were waiting in anticipation.

The Lord was surprised to see the two
And how they'd avoided his men.
Where was Hadj and the twenty knights?
What had become of them?

He dared not ask the princes
'Twould have exposed his treachery.
The princes then stepped forward
Their bargain to agree.

"We bring the crystal to you my Lord
Hence you will free Mirelda.
We must now return to our own lands
To return her to her father"

The Dark Lord approached them as he spoke
"Show me this priceless stone."
Jon laid his bag upon the ground
Took out the casket smooth and round.

"Please stand back" Mark then did say
"It possesses an impulsive force.
Its power will overwhelm you.
Touch it and you will come off worse."

Jon lifted the lid of the casket
Releasing the dazzling light.
All those present in the room
Were awed by the wondrous sight.

The Dark Lord's eyes then opened wide
Its power he now desired.
"Give me the crystal" he ordered Jon
"Then turn about and both be gone."

“You must first release Mirelda”
Said Mark as they stood their ground.
“It shall be done” said the Dark Lord
“A horse will be brought around.”

Just then, a castle guard rushed in
And said that a knight had returned.
“Bring him before me” the Dark Lord said,
To find out what he had learned.

The knight was carried into the room
He was very close to death.
Bloodied and bruised with a broken arm
He breathed with shallow breath.

“What’s happened to Hadj” the Dark Lord demanded
“They’re all now dead” he gasped.
“How could that be with twenty of you?
What you’ve told me cannot be true.”

“The labyrinth holds so many hazards
Many men succumbed to them.
Hadj was strong and led us bravely
But then to him the end did come.”

“How did he die?” The Lord demanded.
The poor knight knew not what to say.
“We found the princes with the crystal.
He touched it and it took him away.”

Mark and Jon now understood
The treacherous plan of the Lord.
His men were meant to slaughter them
He never meant to keep his word.

The Dark Lord knew he'd been caught out
He had also lost his son.
The discussion now was at an end
He was not to be outdone.

"Now just hand over the crystal
My patience is wearing thin."
His hand on his scabbard he pulled out his sword
This was a fight he would win.

"You'll not have the crystal before we depart"
Said Jon "It's the bargain agreed."
"To hell with agreements" the Dark Lord responded
He stabbed Jon, who fell to his knees.

The crystal fell out of the casket
And rolled across the floor.
"Now it's mine" yelled the Dark Lord
"And your lands will be no more."

"Not while I'm breathing" said Jon
As he reached for the crystal, in pain.
He grasped the object in his hand
"For you there will be no gain."

"What have you done?" Mark said to Jon
He never received a reply
The crystal pulsed and exploded in light
The Dark Lord's men shrunk back in fright.

They watched as a blue light enveloped Jon
Who held his arms outstretched
Crackling light spread out from his hands
As the castle's walls came tumbling down.

“Take dear Mirelda” he said to Mark
“My time on the earth is now over.
The Lord of Light is beyond the walls
The Dark Lord’s days are numbered.”

There were shouts from the knights, who armed themselves
“The Lord of Light is attacking.
He has an army a thousand strong
We can’t hold out for very long.”

The Dark Lord was angry and headed for Mark
“They’ll not leave this castle alive.”
He and five knights approached them with swords
To slaughter them they did contrive.

Mark fought hard to keep them at bay
But slowly they drove them back.
Mirelda had also grabbed a sword
To try to fend off the attack.

Jon saw them fighting the couple
And raised his right hand high.
Light crackled from his fingers
And the Lord and his men they did die.

Completely enveloped in flaming light
And writhing on the ground.
Soon their bodies no longer moved
Retribution had come around.

The Light Lord’s army the castle they stormed
And many a man was slaughtered.
But as news of the death of the Dark Lord spread
His men laid down their arms and surrendered.

Then Jon said to Mark “My mission is done
Take Mirelda for your wife.
Our destinies are now both fulfilled
For world peace I gave my life.”

The crystal’s light faded, Jon bid Mark farewell
And very soon both were gone.
No trace of the crystal now remained
And the Lord of Light had won.

Epilogue

Mark approached the Light Lord with Princess Mirelda
And related all that had happened.
“My gratitude knows no bounds” said the Lord
“You may have the hand of my daughter.”

The couple embraced and declared their love
But Mark missed his dear friend Jon.
“Why is it that he gave his life
So that you could be my wife?”

“I loved you both” Mirelda said
“Honest, loyal and true.
Many knights have wooed me
But any like you are few.”

Before the wedding came around
The Elf King once more did appear.
“I give you my blessing” he said to them
Now that peace on earth is here.”

“Please tell me what happened to my dear friend Jon”
Mark asked the King of the Elves.
“He is now the guardian of the stone
Both him and the crystal are one.”

“But why did he give his life for me
When he could have had Mirelda?”
“Our loss of Jon does make our hearts bleed
But he now has the power to help those in need.”

So endeth this ballad, the tale of the crystal
Its current location unknown.
Its powers are dormant, ready to waken
When peace in the world is forsaken.

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