

GAMERS' QUEST

By George Ivanoff



At Your Service

A *Gamers' Quest* story by George Ivanoff © 2009 G Ivanoff

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'Again!' The old mage bellowed, his voice filled with exasperation. 'By the will of the Designers, you shall continue until you get it right.'

'But I've been trying all morning.' The boy's voice was nasal and whiney. 'I'm tired.'

The mage lifted his arm, blue flames engulfing his hand. 'If you are unable to perform a simple toading, then I will demonstrate for you.' His eyes narrowed, threateningly. 'On you!'

'Okay, okay, I'll try again.'

Enthusiasm renewed by fear, the boy focussed on the wide-eyed, white rabbit that sat atop the mage's wooden stool. He raised his wand, glanced at its entwined silver, gold and bronze with desperation and, with a flick of his wrist, pointed it at the rabbit.

A ball of sparks crackled from the tip of the wand. It streaked towards the rabbit. Halfway across the room it began to lose speed and altitude. The sparks missed the rabbit and hit the stool instead.

Purple smoke billowed through the room. The mage coughed and waved a hand to clear the cloud from his face. As the purple haze dissipated, a confused white rabbit was revealed sitting on the head of a large wooden toad.

'Well, it's a start.' The mage groaned and raised his eyes skyward. 'Again.'

* * *

Several hours later, the young apprentice mage left his master's teaching room. He was absolutely exhausted — but also relieved at having finally mastered the toading and un-toading spells. The perplexed rabbit had changed forms half a dozen times at the wave of his wand, before the mage had dismissed his least-promising apprentice. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

The boy knew that he had to master the secrets of magik if he was ever to make it into Designers Paradise. Most of the inhabitants of the World needed a key and lots of money to enter. Not so for a mage. The Designers' rules decreed that a mage did not need a key to enter Designers Paradise — simply being a mage was enough. But, those same rules forbade a mage from using ordinarily acquired wealth. A mage could only pay with gold that had been transformed from lead through that mage's own alchemical spell. And Alchemy was the highest and most difficult form of magik.

The boy longed for Designers Paradise. He longed to enter into a world where magik was but a fantasy; where he did not have to be a mage; where he did not need to study; where he could sleep in every morning instead of rising at the crack of dawn to begin training with his master.

'Hey Bog,' a girl cried out. 'Think fast.'

The boy whirled around just in time to see a rush of sparks. As they struck him in the face, they turned to foul-smelling slime. The boy wiped his face with the sleeve of his purple robe, looking up to see a slightly chubby girl holding a smoking wand.

'Ha, ha,' he said. 'Very funny. Very mature.'

'You're never gonna make even a level 1 mage.' The girl sniggered. 'You can't even dodge a simple slime spell.' She concealed her wand and waddled off, calling back to him over her shoulder. 'You're such a loser, Bog.'

The boy cringed at the sound of his name. Bog. How he hated that name. When he did finally make it past his apprenticeship, he'd be able to choose a new name and title. And he'd finally be rid of 'Bog'.

The boy wiped the rest of the slime from his face as he left the School of Magery. Walking through the Forest, his mind played through the possibilities.

Strongspark the Sturdy?

Truewand the Toadifier?

Undefeated! That would be a good title, he thought. After all, he had never been defeated. The fact that he'd never been in a duel was beside the point. Yes, he thought, Undefeated.

Somethingrother the Undefeated!

Ultramage the Undefeated?

Ulcerate the Undefeated?

Maybe alliteration was not the way to go? What then? Skurge, perhaps?

His stomach rumbled as he walked. He had skipped breakfast that morning because he had slept in. He was starvingly hungry and his mind wandered to his mother's cooking — her soup, made of a tasty broth and ...

At that moment, a young man came running through the trees, almost crashing into him. He looked the apprentice mage up and down, panting for breath.

'You,' he gasped between breaths. 'You are a mage.'

'Well,' began the boy.

'I am Princeling Galbrath,' said the young man, straightening up and adjusting his expensive but dishevelled clothing. 'I require the services of a mage. And as you are here — you will have to do. I have been robbed and I am in need of revenge. Help me and I will pay you twice the going rate for a court mage.'

'Well, actually ...'

'I want you to turn someone into a toad,' continued the princeling.

Bog's face brightened. 'That I can do.' The apprentice mage smiled and then bowed to the princeling. 'I am ... Skurge ... um ... I am Skurgebroth the Undefeated. And I am at your service.'