Sweat dripped down the side of Maledorian’s brow, taking with it specks of dirt from his travels. His sword was chipped from countless battles and his suit of armour was dinted with signs of rust showing at the edges, his journey had been the stuff of legends, not leaving time for proper maintenance, but finally he had made it.

The golden staff was gripped firmly in the skeleton’s hand. The old monarch had sat in this very cave, undiscovered for generations and now, with this final act of his quest, Maledorian would restore him to life and the land would be saved.

This was it. The moment had come. His brawny hand trembled as he went to place the King’s gem into the hole at the top of the dust covered sceptre. The ruby’s cut was perfect; glimmering as if in anticipation under the firelight of his torch, waiting to be restored to its’ rightful place.

With a clink it fit into its’ gold setting. Maledorian held his breath, holding his hand frozen in mid-air as he waited.

Finally, Maledorian’s breath exploded from his lungs in an exaggerated puff. Nothing had happened. He looked around the cave then back to skeleton sitting in the stone throne. Even though its’ eyes had long decomposed the hollow holes seemed to mock him.

“What?” he shouted to the cave, his voice echoing off into the distance.

Maledorian pulled the gem stone out of the sceptre to examine it. The ruby was the biggest gem he had ever seen, it was worth a life’s fortune. As instructed he had taken it from the dragon’s cave… Maledorian placed it in the sceptre again, this time twisting it the other way before standing back.

Maledorian raised his hands to look to the ceiling in despair, letting them fall to his thighs with an exasperated slap.

A small explosion of smoke in his peripheral vision caused Maledorian to turn around. Once the haze cleared, it revealed the one who had set him on his path, Taslessian, a wise wizard and an old comrade.

“Have you placed the stone?” he asked Maledorian as he walked up to the alter. “I was hoping to feel the rush of energy of the king returning to life but there was nothing.”

Maledorian waved him over to the throne. “Nothing happened, I placed the darn rock into the sceptre but nothing!”

Taslessian’s joints cracked as he took the steps up to the throne. He bent down to peer at the sceptre closely.

“Wrong stone,” he said flatly.

“What do you mean it’s the wrong stone?” Maledorian asked, a hint of hysteria in his voice.

“The stone for the King’s sceptre is blue, the one that you’ve put here is red.”

“But you said to get the stone from the dragon, that once I had it, it would protect me on my journey here,” Maledorian’s meaty hand reached up to scratch the back of his head.

Taslessian shrugged. What more could he say?

“So I stole the gem and then survived my battle with the dragon by myself?”

Taslessian nodded.

“I trekked through the snow dunes of Mengah for three days without food or fire, convinced the snow men to let me pass and fought through their trial of truth without any help?”

Taslessian was looking at his fingernails, trying to work a piece of dirt out from underneath one of them. Looking up to the wide eyes of the Knight, again he nodded.

“I sailed through the lakes of fire, climbed the cliffs of doom and sacrificed my virtue to the hideous hag of the jungle so that she would give me the map to this cave all without the sceptre gem to keep me safe?” Maledorian’s fingers ran through his ragged uncut hair, almost pulling some out as he raised them again in frustration.

“What can I say,” Taslessian looked at him. “The gem is defiantly supposed to be green…”

“You just said it should be blue.” Maledorian’s eyes focused on the wizard. Once he had been young, nimble and unparalleled in the world of magic, but past quests had taken their toll, draining the very youth from Taslessian to leave the doddering old man standing before him.

“Did I?” Taslessian placed his hand under his chin to think for a moment.

Maledorian reached out and took the red gem from the King’s sceptre, placing it in his pocket. At least he would not want for funds after this past year that he knew he would never get back. One question bothered him though.

“How did I manage to survive such trials if the gem I have now is nothing but a shiny bauble that’s about to fund my retirement?”

Taslessian looked at him with surprising clarity in his elderly gaze.

“Farked if I know.”

Maledorian smiled at the absurdity of a well-respected pillar of the wizard community using such language. Finally he shrugged at his own luck. He had suffered, he had done things that would make even a woman-mad sailor shudder and by all rights he should be dead.

“Well, once you work it out, you can let someone else know,” Maledorian waved at Taslessian who still stood, stroking his beard in contemplation.

Only the heavy footsteps on stone as Maledorian left lifted the wizard’s eyes. He raised a finger, sure that he finally had the answer but the Knight had already gone.

Taslessian signed as he thought of all the young knights coming up through the training ranks at the Keep. Maledorian had been trustworthy and true, but like all questers, there was only so much he would put up with.

This time round, he would take better precautions, making sure that his latest hero grabbed the blue gem and the green as well. There would be others. By just looking through the legends of history, there were always quests that needed to be taken and without fail, there were always others ready to take on the quest.