

TALE OF THE RUBY PIECES

Allan Bard





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To be a ten year old boy in the ancient times was definitely something no one would strive for... Being a ten year old boy, Bren knew that very well.

Actually, he was certain even the experienced warriors or the skillful wizards were thinking the many dangers in their world would scare anyone of them too... As to cope with the many hordes of Brown faces, or their horrible freelancers – the cave bears, the Fiery men, the flying korks, the fish-keepers, the one-eyeds, and some of the other evil human races, was a task as horrible as the brown-skinned warriors' cracked faces...

But the most dreadful news was that Bren, the youngest one amongst his kind-hearted, but desperate people, had to save all the good creatures in the antiquity. Unfortunately, even the most experienced wizards couldn't tell how the young boy could do that...

About the Author:

Ivan Stoikov (Allan Bard) is Bulgarian, lives in Sofia, the capital of sunny Bulgaria. He has a bachelor's degree in biology, which helps him a lot in writing some of his books. Though he had many jobs in the past (telephone technician, salesman of newspapers and magazines, manager in a supermarket, consultant in a fashion house, storehouse-man, etc.), he thinks there's no better job than writing books. "Tale Of The Rock Pieces" is his first book, but he thinks he has enough imagination to write books until the end of his days (or maybe after that too...).

Tale Of The Rock Pieces

By

Allan Bard - Ivan Stoikov



Eloquent Books

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Dedication

Let this book be a present to all my friends – present or future.

Acknowledgements

Unfortunately, I don't know the names of all the people who helped me write or edit my book... I just have to let you know they were a lot, as I'm not a native Englishman or American, so I needed much help...

I'm very grateful to Ani Batchvarova, Blagoy Delev and Michael Lamb! Let the wonderful noise of the sea always sounds in their ears! Thank you!!!

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Introduction

Many of the deeds in this book require magical skills and many trainings, so don't try them at home!

Have you ever heard or read the stories about ancient times? If your answer is no, my guess is you're likely wrong, as you are either too old and don't remember learning of these amazing events, or you are too young to have learned about all the glory and magnificence of antiquity. As the stories about ancient times are so extraordinary, incredible and true at the same time, that they are always welcome, no matter where they are told. Though, unfortunately, a great part of the things, which we should know about antiquity, are irrevocably lost in a past long gone. And even at the present time, we are not certain whether all that reaches us fits the truth. But this derisively scanty information is worth the admiration for those of us in the 21st century. What we are able to piece together at present could hardly compare with the greatness and beauty our remarkable, remote predecessors made formerly.

Many of the things in this tale, that is about the world such as it was at one time, seem unbelievable. I am not very sure whether all that is described further happened exactly that way, but it doesn't mean all that couldn't have happened at all. There are many much more unbelievable and strange events in other stories of the past. That's why I hope nobody will accuse me of having exaggerated or added something by myself, for my ancient story to become more complete. Of course, there are many tellers who go beyond all bounds and for the sake of a swift and easy gain concoct lots of nonsense. Perhaps there

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are some concocted things in the ancient story you will read, but they are quite inessential and don't change the main part of the action.

I'd better write some explanatory notes about the numerous creatures that lived in the ancient times, but later on became extinct from the face of the earth. Probably you've never heard about the awful Brown faces and the Fiery people, about the water dragons and the giant fish-keepers, or about the weightless korks and the rock pieces. There is nothing odd about that, as they all existed a very long time ago.

Brown faced people! In the past, their mention was equal to the mention of evil. It is hard for one to find evil deeds, which aren't related to them in some way. These hateful representatives of mankind were also called just Brown faces, and took part in almost all the sanguinary battles and wars in the ancient times. Some of the men of science often show that as a main cause for their later extinction, though I consider their warlike nature was just an insignificant reason. It's rather their striving for power and domination over the living beings, from which they might benefit, that played the main part for their death, as one of their cardinal purposes - to master the Magic, even at the price of everything that their awful imagination could figure out.

As their name suggests, the Brown faces had brown skin, although it was different from the one of the Africans and mulattoes of today. Their features also differed from the black-skinned people's features, and much resembled those of the Europeans, but were quite rougher than them. Of course, it didn't mean that the Brown faces were beautiful. Many great warriors shivered with disgust at the sight of the awful, rough forms of their countenances.

Usually, the height of these evil people was average, but many tall ones could also be found amongst them, though that happened rarely. Their build was good from a human point of view, not counting their afflictions, which affected the skeleton mostly. In the antiquity, it was even considered there was nothing that looked worse than a Brown face with bones, which were curved by the illness. Yet, the ill's failing health had a little influence on their great bodily strength. The countless quantity of won battles and the numerous enslaved creatures were a certain proof of that. Everyone knew the ugly Conquerors' muscles could create thousands of miracles, but their tough arms never moved a bit, even on building of their own homes. For that purpose,

the Brown faces always used the gratuitous labour of their slaves, who were exploited very cruelly. Actually, the only place where these monsters acted alone was the battle ground.

Today there are hardly any remains of the former imposing castles and palaces, which were connected with branched, underground tunnels and galleries, though nobody is certain of that. If you ever find a stronghold (or rather a part of it), covered with gold and jewels and built that way, as if the building material had been preliminarily molten, then the ancient construction was cast without the use of any binding we use today, you have to know that this spectacular creation was made with the back-breaking labour of the ugly people's slaves. The Brown faces were fond of life in luxury and wealth; therefore they didn't spare the poor, captured beings, when the evil warriors wanted to find and dig up new treasures, or build their homes. Then it was quite normal for the weaker workers to meet their death in the deep and as if endless underground galleries, dragging a giant piece of gold or the ancient black metal, expecting to get a day's rest for it. Only at the sight of a great quantity of precious metals, the Brown faces became a little more favourable to the captives, though just for a while. Therefore, the popular opinion in the antiquity was that the color of their soul was much darker than the color of their skin.

The women of the horrible race were as "beautiful", as the Brown faced men. It is said that the Conquerors' wives differed from their husbands mostly in the forms of their bodies, not in their faces. Everyone who saw an enslaver's wife for the first time, and of course who did not know anything about them, would think right away: "...in the presence of so many slave women (far and away more beautiful than their masters), the more stalwart warriors probably prefer the beauty to their own blood." Certainly not! As odd as it sounds, until now there is no event, describing a marriage between a Brown face and a maiden of other human race, even if she was as evil as a Warlike. Their wives also hated all the men who did not look like those of their own race. But yet, it happened once in a great while, that a man of the power-loving people took a good-looking, foreign slave woman to his bed, and the cause was their curiosity, not the desire for love. But if his compatriots found out, then withdrawal of all the ranks and privileges (many as they were), and immediate banishment from the conquered lands were

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waiting for him. Besides, the same rule applied to a Brown face woman, who gave way to the curiosity.

The women of that aggressive race were physically less weak, than their armoured warriors with a sinister look. But that didn't prevent the brown-skinned ladies from fighting in all the battles and wars, together with their strong husbands. This minute detail entitled them to choose the best trophies of the plunder for themselves, after the hard battle operations. Though because of their great avidity the conquered things always seemed too insufficient to them, and they always murmured and grumbled. Oftentimes, it even happened that the "gentle" better half of an ugly Conqueror, who proved to be a perfect warrior, was chosen for a leader in the forthcoming engagements. Of course, that one, who headed the terrible army, was very good at fighting with swords and at the great accuracy and quickness shooting with a bow.

The Brown faces' wives were fond of dressing in decorations of gold or other jewels, while at the same time they perfectly realized that they didn't sit well on their appearance. Another weakness of theirs, besides the collecting of treasures, was the education of the children and mostly the training of the girls. The awful monsters' youngsters trained themselves to get used to the very severe atmosphere of the bloody battles from their earliest age, because the good fighting with weapons was also too important for their training. The punishments for those who didn't fight as well as they had to were painful and cruel enough, so that they might think how skillful they would be at the next training. Those children who fought well were arrogant with the weaker, and it even happened that they themselves punished the poor, young warriors. Oftentimes, some of the weaker and more wounded pupils kept their beds for a week or two, so that their awful and bloody wounds could heal up, and they could be back on the training ground.

Good warriors as the Brown faces were, sometimes they needed allies for the greater and important engagements. It was logical to expect that they were also unscrupulous and cruel enough, so that they could use this opportunity - to fight together with the most warlike race in the antiquity. The preferred creatures for this purpose were chosen by many qualities, and they could be found mostly in the Fiery people. I am not sure whether the name people were suitable for them, because they resembled us only in their appearance. These awful, red and hot creatures were composed of a head, a trunk, two legs and two

arms, although there weren't any organs in them, there were only flames. In their faces, these spiteful, ancient monsters had only eyes and a mouth that was full of teeth of hard, white fire. They ate only by their mouths, devouring everything that could burn, and felt a deep-seated hatred of the water and the fluids with similar effect.

Practically, the Fiery people were immortal. They could die when there was nothing they could eat, and they were hungry for a long time, or if they were poured water on. But don't think a splash with a liquid stopped their life. To kill a Fiery creature, his enemies stood in several near to a place with water, and then poured cold torrents on him during half or one hour, using big containers for that purpose. Only after this tiring procedure, it was certain that the red Fiery man would never come back to life again.

The Fiery people's strength was also so great, as the one of the Brown faces. But the Fieries had a great advantage in the ancient engagements - they didn't feel a violent pain when they were stabbed with a sharp, shining sword, or were pierced with an arrow. Any object could pass through their bodies, and that had no effect on their fiery health. These superb qualities of theirs let them fight very well days and nights, unless there was a wizard near by, who could make a charm for a pouring and prolonged rain.

After the successful battles, the awful, red monsters didn't look at the objects of precious stones and gold decorations. Their eyes, glowing with a black flame, were fixed on the dead bodies and on the seriously wounded warriors, for whom the cure was prolonged and too expensive, or would be dead soon. They carried these "trophies" of theirs into their deep, mountain caves, or into the Brown faces' vaults, where they began a terrible, bloody feast with the dead and not so dead bodies. The "wise" reflection of Dong, the Fiery creatures' chief, reached our days: "There's nothing more savoury than the human flesh, and there's nothing that sounds better, than a death-scream of the live food, caused by the fiery teeth."

Oftentimes, besides the Hot men, the ugly Brown faces needed the favours of other creatures too - the cave bears. In the past, a very long time ago, when the times were more favourable for them, they inhabited almost every large cave everywhere on Earth. The main purpose, for which the Warlike monsters used them, rarely was their direct participation in the fighting operations. It was the secret reconnais-

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sance. The big, cave bears stood the cold, hunger and wet for a long time, by contrast with the Fiery men, therefore they became irreplaceable, when something important about the enemy had to be understood before the decisive fight. Besides, this animal race could move very stealthily, although its representatives had big trunks. The only disadvantage for the execution of the secret missions, which were assigned to them, was the pale, red radiance coming out of the bears' eyes in too dark nights.

In the past, before they went to serve with the Brown faces, the four-legged scouts ate plants and forest fruits, putting a small, savoury animal into their mouths just from time to time. It is said that when for the first time they tasted a human meat, generously given to them by the ugly, brown faced winners, they forgot the taste of the vegetarian food. After that, many clumsy beasts went to live in the underground galleries forever, which were dug by the slaves. Quite a few of them stayed to rove in the mountains, but they were always ready to serve the Conquerors when they needed them. After the won battles, the hairy bear-scouts were rewarded well with human and other fresh flesh, which could be found in the battle-field.

Oftentimes, the Brown faces' shaggy allies gathered in groups of a few bears, during their reconnaissance marches. In that way, a few of them distracted their enemy's attention, and in the meantime the rest remembered or stole secret plans, kidnapped young children, or for the sake of variety destroyed and broke the homes and settlements. In the ancient times, there weren't any other creatures that were able to learn the things they saw and heard as well as the cave bears.

When it was necessary to fight with riders, the warlike, brown race also used horses, but the hooped animals put them on a level with the enemies. Therefore the Brown faces almost always preferred to ride other subordinates of theirs - the weightless korcs, and they were of the most used captives in the past. These nice and harmless, ancient creatures lived in the one-time dense and vast mountain forests. Their bodies (which were wide two and a half feet, long about ten feet, and thick from a few to ten inches) resembled ellipses with slightly sharp and soft ends. The mouths, that had hard, horny teeth by which the ancient creatures bit off of the forest vegetation, were on their soft, rounded foreparts. The air "horses" had no eyes, therefore it was considered that they orientated themselves like the bats, namely by sound,

which came out of their comparatively small orifices for feeding, and was reverberated from the near and distant objects.

The color of the weightless korks could vary very fast in a large color range. That let them "disguise" themselves on any terrain, just for a split second at that. It was difficult for the inexperienced eye to see even a kork, flying from a very light to a very dark place, because of that perfect and instantaneous adaptation to the surrounding area. Only in their mating season, when the flat creatures were performing their love dance, they forgot about the dangers and changed their colors fast, not paying attention to the background. Everyone who had the pleasure of watching the graceful flight of the incredible beings in all the possible colors remembered that indescribable sight forever.

As a matter of fact, the name "weightless" isn't very correct. These silently flying, elegant subordinates of the Conquerors were really comparatively light, but yet were heavy enough, so all the wounded fliers were left on the battle-field. No one of the awful Brown faces liked to carry them to the castles. It was much easier to take new and healthy korks from the large stock-breeding farms for the weightless beings. If there they were few, the dark-skinned warriors went hunting for new-born, flat creatures in the mountain forests. And the Brown faces' slaves weren't made carry the wounded beings, because these flying horses had very delicate constitutions and didn't live very long, so to treat them was out of question.

One of the things that the Conquerors never did was the dangerous hunt of water dragons. Until they became extinct, these giant dwellers of the seas were in a great demand by the people, who had enough money to buy them. The purpose for this reckless killing, which was attended with great dangers of course, was the miraculous qualities of the flesh of the dragon. Usually, a man using water dragons' meat in his food was not ill, and lived thrice longer than the other people of his race. That was why the water dragons were valued high, and their hunters were paid well after the finished work. Now I will not describe the hard (and extremely dangerous) hunt of the giant creatures deep in the sea, because further in my story there'll be a chapter, dedicated to the courageous but avid people, who practised this ancient craft.

As for the Brown faces, they didn't bear the water and although some of them could swim, they always preferred to pay the divers well

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for the valuable food, than to drench themselves and perhaps to be eaten too.

Sometimes, the warriors with ugly faces resorted to the favours of other water animals. When the avid Brown faces sank a ship or other vessel, which was stuffed up with treasures, then a great part of them sank to the bottom of the sea, before they were grabbed. In these cases, the fish-keepers came to help. They were much smaller than the water dragons, but predatory enough to perfectly execute the assigned tasks, namely jealous guarding of the sunken wealth. Usually, the brave divers who ventured to steal the jewels guarded by the giant animal were very few, and usually they never came to the surface again.

Oftentimes, after the due reward of tasty human meat, the awful, scaly monster drew out the gold unassisted to the surface, especially if it was in a shallow place and in small quantities. But more often the jewels sank at thousands of feet under the water, and then the beast stayed there for months, until the ugly warriors managed to find suitable men to draw the trophies out. The huge fish easily got down at a great depth, but rising to the surface he had to swim very slowly for a day or two. Otherwise, his body burst and his stomach came out through the mouth, because of the great difference in the pressure of the water on the surface and on the floor.

At the time of the awful warriors' domination, often a whole nation was enslaved, and as the years went by died by inches of the extremely hard work in the underground galleries. If the enslaved people had some special skills the Brown faces could use, they were much wanted by the ugly Conquerors. But that didn't mean creatures like them were privileged in comparison with the common slaves. Quite the contrary - they were exploited much more than the rest, as besides the digging or throwing out of soil, these captives did other work too, according to their knowledge. And because of that many of the enemies, pressed in a tight place, preferred to die in the battles than to be slaves of the hateful monsters. Sometimes, the warriors who really loved freedom even killed themselves, facing the possibility to spend the rest of their lives in the underground tunnels. One of these noble races of mankind that loved freedom was the one of the Mountain people. In the past, and now too, one could hardly come across creatures who were more contrary to the Warlikes than the Mountaineers. Very noble and full of good intentions, these ancient noblemen never

attacked first and waged battles and wars only when it was really necessary. Their battle skills and tactics often exceeded these of the Brown faces, and the quality of the Mountain people's weapons was unsurpassable and they kept their arms mastery in dead secrecy from everyone, who had evil thoughts.

In the ancient times, people from the mountains weren't widespread because they were often captured by the numerous, awful Brown faces, or died in the battles with them. The mountain people were pursued everywhere by the ugly enslavers, because of their many talents and skills. It was especially valued that the Mountaineers, or actually the wizards amongst them, mastered the Magic to perfection. Today, at the time of advance in science and technique, one could hardly imagine how many incredible and useful things the ancient possessors of the magnificent skills did. It's unbelievable how the "molten", stone castles and homes, that remained from the past, were built with the help of the wonder-working palms. And this building required only a pair of hands using magic. Often, this ancient miracle was also used for making of clothes and shoes, by it breeds and varieties were created, and even quite new, useful animal and plant species, and many, many other marvels.

Probably today many people will consider the Mountaineers' way of life awful, but I am sure there are some too, that will admire them. Usually, the noble people preferred to make their settlements high in the mountains, near a lake or a large river, which often occurred in the antiquity. Tasty fish and algae for food of the dwellers of the village were bred and grown in these cold water basins. Close and very stout clothes and shoes were made from water plants, after suitable magical treatment. Though the Mountain people could make thick garments, good for cold weather, they were almost always wearing quite light clothes, regardless of the weather. Even in the severe cold spells in winter, they dived in the ice-cold waters with a loud and joyful laughter, to mow the under-water meadows, to plant new ones, or in honor of a merry feast of theirs. All that was the reason for their phenomenally iron constitution, and their long life-span, which (if they weren't killed in the battle-field or in the dark galleries) reached several hundred years and more.

The cheerful noblemen from the high mountains loved life very much (the free life at that), but that love didn't prevent them from ac-

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cepting death with dignity, when it was necessary. Oftentimes, the pitiless and severe Brown faces shuddered with the steel shine of the look the Mountaineers had at that moment. These brave men, who swam perfectly, didn't feel the ground slipping from under their feet even when they were enslaved. As after the long hours of tiring work, the Mountaineers made plans for escape at the back of their minds, and often got rid of their enslavers and came back alive and kicking to their people.

The ancient possessors of the Magic were tall enough, so they stuck out at least by a head amongst the Brown faces. Their tempers, as well as their appearances, differed much from these of the brown warmongers. The Mountain people's skin was white or slightly swarthy, when it was necessary for them to stay in the sun for a longer time. Their features resembled those of the Europeans of today, but in contrast with the ugly people, the dwellers of the mountains were beautiful and handsome. The mountain men always wore beards and moustaches, which were well-trimmed and made their appearance still nobler.

The Mountaineers' bodily strength surpassed their warlike enemies' strength, or at least, was equal to theirs. Besides, the evil enslavers often resorted to a dishonest stratagem, or insidious actions in the battle that tipped the balance on their side.

Children of the people from the high, ancient mountains got accustomed to the cold from their earliest age. When they grew up, they learned to fight well with any objects, not only with the ancient weapons. Their parents knew very well what their future life held in store for them, therefore the training was intensive enough. But that did not mean the weaker pupils were punished or beaten after each failure of theirs. The adults in charge of the good fighting skills of the girls and boys just showed them what they had to do better, and how to do that. The thrashing as a way of education wasn't used at all. Besides, the young pupils were full of desire to master the fighting and the other arts, which they were taught. And because of that, they stayed after the trainings at their own free will, and trained until they began to swing the metal blades fairly well, or to hurl their wooden discuses with a great accuracy.

Besides the swords, sabres and bolts, the Mountain people had another very effective weapon - the flying discuses. These round, fi-

ghting miracles were subconcave underneath in the middle, made of wood, and were often used even more than the shooting with a bow. The wooden weapon, thrown by a man knowing how to do that, could whirl and move at a great speed. If it didn't come across an obstacle on its way, it described a big circle in the air and came back right in its possessor's hand, like Australian boomerang. How effective the flying discus was, the fact told that by a slight push (caused by Magic and sent towards the wooden circle), it smoothly cut off a tree that had its diameter. And if the bole was thicker, a narrow, rectangular hole of the same size as the outline of the remarkable weapon remained in it.

Behind the ancient Mountaineers' great bodily strength, there was always the kindest and grandest soul, which could be found in the representatives of the mankind. The majority of the noble people could compose incredibly good verses, often accompanied by the tender music, which came out of their magical crystals. These instruments were designed to create such melodies, that made the blood in the veins boil and the eyes of the warriors shed tears. The same warriors, who otherwise didn't turn a hair in the face of the awful death. In the past, thousands of good creatures gathered together at the feasts, organized by the ancient noblemen. Because the remarkable dances to the much more remarkable sounds from the transparent objects, skillfully made by the wizards' wonder-working hands, were praised rightfully everywhere on Earth.

Of course, there are some other creatures too, who are typical of the ancient times and will be mentioned further, like the rock pieces. The heading of this book has their name, although they are mentioned quite more rarely than the ugly Brown faces and the people from the mountains. The reason for this was that these moving stones lived so long ago, that today we know next to nothing about them. But the few details, which are known about their life now, will be described in the course of the action, and I will endeavour not to exaggerate anything about them anywhere. Their role in this story is great and important enough.