

Rite of Passage... On Boethiah's Lesson of Value

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How can you elves worship devils like that? Your love of them Daedra come from some inner desire to put others on edge? Or do you all just admire evil so much?

It's hard to consider evil those who came to your forefathers as a friend and showed them how to become so much more than what they were.

More? I mean no disrespect, so take no offense. Devils... gods... or no, we've bashed shield and steel together side by side. By mine own father's law we be as close as blood siblings. I just am trying to wrap my head around it. How can a *thing* like Boethiah help anyone become anything *more* other than more *terrible*?

Hrmph... fine. Then tell me what it is that *you* know of Boethiah?

That devil? You swear to take no offense?

What offense is there to be taken from ignorant words?

Ignorant? We'll see about that!

Now who's taking offense?

Hrmph... I'm curious, that's all.

Well, go on then. ***What* does Boethiah represent?**

Represent? ***She's*** a demon that coerced folk to do terrible things. Things like stabbing your liege lord in the back, plotting the downfall of others for no just cause. ***She's*** about lying and deceiving to get what you want and killing anyone who might be in your way to get it. Supplicants slaughter each other in ***her*** name to win her favor, only to be tossed aside when another grabs ***her*** fancy and then plots their death. How is a spirit like that worthy of admiration?

That's a very small part of the picture. Do you sleep with one eye open, scared my knife will fell you in the night? *He* represents much more than those little trifles...

Ho! You are welcome to try... But I told you. My axe and your blade have already danced together against many. We've bled for one another, and I trust you as much as any from mine own Hall. You're a good sort... as much as any elf can be, and especially for a lass... Say I have too little a picture? Well then, paint a better one for me then...

Urgh... ok fine. What if I explain it by telling you a story? I'll keep it simple so not to lose your attention.

Can't just spit it out? That's fine, we've nothing but time to kill anyway. There's wine and mead a'plenty here anyway. How bout this? If your tale makes even the slightest sense, I'll pay the tab, but if I catch you spinning some nonsensical hogwash, drinks are on you...

Eh? we'll see. I'll begin...

Long ago, in a time before any cities, walls, temples or towers were raised from stone... families lived simple lives amongst the plains, forests, rivers, and mountains. Life was measured by the hunts, tribes shared hearth, family next to family, and rituals ruled their daily lives

One such tribe dwelled in a valley next to a very old forest, and amongst this tribe a boy was born. There was nothing unusual about the birth of this boy, and like with all children, he was midwifed by the tribal matrons and welcomed heartily by all. In 3 days time the entire tribe brought him deep into the forest to a cave next to a fork the stream that gave the tribe their source of water. Here the Khan... perhaps you'll prefer King... no, Chief is more apt... gave the boy his name, and all the tribe welcomed him as son beneath the light of Secunda. For you see, each family looked after one another, and even though the boy had a mother and father and were an only child... he was parented by the tribe, having surrogates in all its members...

Yeah, yeah... "it takes a village..." What does this have to do with....?

Can I finish? You said paint a picture... Anyway...

Before even the boy could speak, his education began. His elders taught him all about the world around them, and his place within it. Like most young lads, he would grow up to hunt to provide for the tribe, and eventually prove himself a warrior to defend it.

Defend it from what? Did his tribe war often?

This was a simpler time. Warring was more like light skirmishes over resources... but yes, he would be expected to defend his extended family from other rival tribes when the need arose. But there were far worse things they taught him that they would need help guarding against.

Worse things? Like what?

They boy was taught about the Spirits in the forest.

Spirits!?

Yes, spirits... that cave where the boy received his name... they taught him that an Old Earth Spirit dwelled deep beneath in the caverns inside it... and it was from that opening the first of his tribe were born from its bones and entered into the world.

However, there were malevolent spirits too. Great demons that desired to take the Earth Spirit for their own. They had feathered necks, scaly hides, and oh so terrible faces... The boy was always taught to fear them and be always vigilant.

And he believed that? Probably just trolls or goblins...

Yes, the boy believed... but not on hearsay or word alone... he saw *them*... every year.

What!?

Yes... every year at the dawn of spring... *They* came... He was taught that as the world grew colder it was because the Earth Spirit felt them coming, and fled deeper from the surface. If the demons weren't removed, she would never return and the cold season would never end... The tribe were her sacred protectors, and the evil spirits loathed them for it, plaguing them to no end between seasons, only to amass in the longest night, ready for blood as Magnus turned his gaze...

Every year the boy saw the terrifying creatures come out of the woods with terrible shrieks, spears shaking wildly as they set upon the tribe's encampment. The boy cowered in fear as the shamans prepared a sacred barrier to keep the violent demons out, and performed the rites to send the spirits fleeing back into the forest. The boy then cheered as the warriors of his tribe, the boy's father among them, gave chase and returned victorious.

The boy was taught from the very beginning, to be considered a man he must first join the annual battle, where he'd prove himself a warrior.

And did he?

The boy grew enough to start hunting, and had a talent for it. Not just as a team with his fellows, but alone as well. He became strong, he became swift, but most of all... the boy became clever. He even felled beasts as mighty as your Snowcats... But no matter the prize he felled and brought to the tribe, he was still treated as a only a mere child.

Then the boy reached age enough, and he shook eagerly as the nights grew longer and colder.

The long night came, the twin moons were greeted with the hellish shrieks and chattering displays by the devil spirits. The rite was completed and the boy clamored for his spear and club. With these in hand, he set out for the first time, lagging behind the warriors who seemed to have been instinctually aware and prepared so quickly.

The boy dashed ahead through the wood with all his speed, through the many paths he had learned so well. After some time he heard the sounds of a scuffle and circled in.

He emerged into a clearing near the stream. His ears caught the sound of splashing further upstream, but his eyes beheld his own father on his back in the mud, spear still raised but grasping what appeared to be a wound in his side.

The boy's father bid him not to stop for him, and ushered him to give chase, lest that his assailant might escape. The boy gripped his spear and dashed further upstream.

Around a bend, the boy came face to face with the beastly spirit. It stood as tall as a man, had a mane of feathers and fur, skin patterned in the like of scales, and a still yet monstrous expression upon its face. It cackled and howled and postured its weapon, bidding the boy to meet it in combat. The boy readied himself, took sure grip and footing, and lunged to meet it in melee.

And was he victorious?

Not quite... while the boy was strong and quick, so was the demon... however, the boy could feel that the beast was far more experienced in the art of spear play than him. His every stab, sweep, and lunge were easily swept aside, deflected into missing every mark. In moments the boy was pressured into the defensive, flashing widely just to stay alive.

So he lost then?

Fortunately, the stream the battle took place next to had made the cold rocks on its shore slick enough that the boy was able to manage to prevent the beast sure enough footing for the definitive strike. Knowing how dire the current situation was, the boy had a moment of inspiration.

He had an idea?

Yes... the boy still felt his club at his side, and noticed the demon carried no other weapon than the spear he was barely holding back. As I said, the boy grew clever, and realizing where in the stream they were, formulated a plan. Around the bend was a very special form in the stream...

In an long sweep from his attacker's lance, the boy threw his spear at the creature's loins. The demon rolled to the side, easily dodging the attack... but that was the opening the boy needed. The boy disengaged and began running around the next bend, drawing his club as he went.

The demon howled and gave chase, dancing as it went... making merrily what it perceived as cowardice in the boy. But the boy ran not out of fear, and hastened to the mouth of the cave that had named him and all his kin. The boy slipped inside the cave and beat the cavern walls to bid his opponent come.

Why would he do that? What good is a cave?

The boy figured that the walls of the cave opening would limit the movements of the creature's spear, but not inhibit the strikes he could make with his much shorter club and yet still enable him to circle and dodge.

Was he right?

The demon entered the cave with still eyes, bared teeth, and the same unmoving expression it wore the entire length of their battle.

Lunge... the boy dodged... Stab... the boy deflected... Sweep!... the beast's spear tip met stone, granting the boy a precious second as the demon tried to recover from the recoil. A quick forward step... and the boy swung with all his might in an upward arc and struck the evil spirit just under the chin. The beast let out a grunt and fell to the ground spinning backwards... in the dark the boy could see the beast's feathered mane flying off to the corner of the cavern, as if it took flight to escape what would come next.

The boy readied for the final blow and just as he was ready to unleash it... the boy was met with a familiar voice, way too close, crying for him to "STOP!"

As Magus's first rays pierced into the cavern... the body of the demon turned to reveal the face of his Chief, body now wet and running as the painted pattern that had seemed as scales, slid off revealing normal flesh.

Aghast, the boy stumbled back and kicked at the feathery mane... it rolled over to show the face of the creature, still frozen with that same still gaze and expression...

A mask!?

Yes, a mask...

The chief rose and explained to the boy what it was all about. That his passage into manhood was never about winning or losing, it wasn't about gods or spirits... it was about uncovering the truth that lied behind it all, and by finding out in his own way. All that was needed was to stand up to the challenge, to meet it head on. Truthfully, few new warriors stood a chance at victory, but this boy did well. The chief was proud to be the first to greet the boy as a man.

So it all was a big charade?

Yes, but not without a purpose... the chief went on to tell the man more... like how even his role of chief was too just another mask easily stripped away. All the roles each man and woman plays, every challenge before you that you will undertake... it's all just masks people wear and take as their mantles for a time. Mother, Father, Friend, Enemy, Challenger, and Opponent... Child and Adult...

But Masks aren't strength... Masks aren't truth... Masks aren't worth... true worth and strength reside in the person underneath... Value comes from the individual, and the only power Masks can have is the power you and others give unto them. This was the lesson towards manhood, that it matters not the masks or titles others place on you, but the willingness to see past the roles and visages of those before you,... learning to be self defining, and knowing that donning and doffing all the masks one must in life is not what gives you worth. When others place a mask on you, cast it off... or use the power in their expectation it holds for your own ends. None ought be clung to too tightly... In the end, it's not the cave, or the tribe, nor the chief who defines your worth... it's what you do and how you do it, and what it means to you.

That's what Boethiah showed Veloth and taught my ancestors... *he* peeled back the mask of Trinimac and revealed the masks the Altmer had fooled us into wearing. Once revealed, we chose to cast those masks aside that would keep us in the mud at their heels and set off to find our own worth. This world is a challenge, and while we meet it wearing the mask of challenger... we will determine the worth behind the shallow visages. Gods... kings... prophets... names that are just masks, when worn by the weak and worthless... they hold no real worth... deeds make men and women worthy... not masks. This was the deceit *he* taught us how to see through. Even Veloth set aside his own mask in the mountains as a friend asked for a sacrifice, and he set his hammer down forever...

Folk call us 'Dark' and 'Devils'... but we children of the Tribune know better. You can cast those masks at us, and we'll use their power against you... as long as your blinded by the veils you cloak us in, too blind to see our true worth...

Hmm... I think I see your point. I'm still not sure I buy *her* as being a good devil though... but that was quite the tale. Definitely worth a few drakes, I got the tab. Oh... but one more thing... did the New Man accept this lesson?

After the chief had explained it all... the man picked up the mask and feathery mane of the spirit warrior. "And what now?" the man asked?

"Whatever you wish" the chief replied.

"And what of this?" asked the man.

"That depends on if you find that the value in this lesson is worth teaching others. You conquered the mask, you are free to cast it off or wear it as you see fit. Just like all the masks you'll wear forevermore.

The man smiled, and returned to his tribe, greeting his proud father, revealed to be uninjured, along the way.

It would be many years until the demon would be bested again, but with every challenger, the mask would eventually fall and another would be taught a very valuable lesson...