

HOARD TALES

by

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I It's almost time! In only five years, *Lairs Magazine* is going to release its centenary Hordes 400 list." A gold dragon, the size of a small hill, swished his tail about in enthusiasm, sending a jangling wave through the mounds of coins and gems that would shame an avaricious dwarven king. Within the hollowed-out mountain, the light from the setting sun streamed through the cave opening and glinted off gold coins and aurous scales alike.

Three smaller dragons scrambled to avoid the avalanche of crashing, clinking platinum and gold and silver, rubies and sapphires and diamonds.

"I'm sure you'll be at the top of the list again, Uncle Skinflint," one of the smaller dragons said. His scales were a vibrant green, and dozens of small, conical spikes protruded from about his head and face.

"I don't know, Toothy," a small, deep-red-scaled dragon said. A line of bony spikes started just behind his eyes and ran along his neck and back, to the tip of his tail. "I hear Hardheart Hidehoard might win this time."

"WHAAAT!" Uncle Skinflint shouted, and a puff of fire and smoke, along with the smell of brimstone, escaped his maw. Atop his skull was an upward sweeping plate, from which

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extended an array of horns, which shrunk in size the farther they were from the top of the head.

“Who told you that, Scaly?”

Scaly, the red dragon, slunk away to put a small pile—still the size of a respectable mansion—of coins between him and his uncle. “It’s—well—everyone is saying it, Uncle.”

“I haven’t lost in a thousand years,” Skinflint said, “and I’ll be a snake’s sibling if that sneaky silver out hoards me!”

“What are you going to do, Uncle Skinflint?” a small dragon with vivid blue scales said. Two large, forward-sweeping horns projected from either side of his face.

“I don’t know,” Skinflint said, his rumbling voice downcast like a sad rockslide. “Breathy, Scaly, Toothy, I need to think.”

“Okay, Uncle,” the three small dragons said in unison and left the mountainous cavern for the tunnels leading to their smaller grottos.

Behind them, Uncle Skinflint gave a powerful beat of his wings and dove into his ocean of coins and treasure, basking in the comforting feel of precious metal. A sensual “Ahh” followed the three dragons.